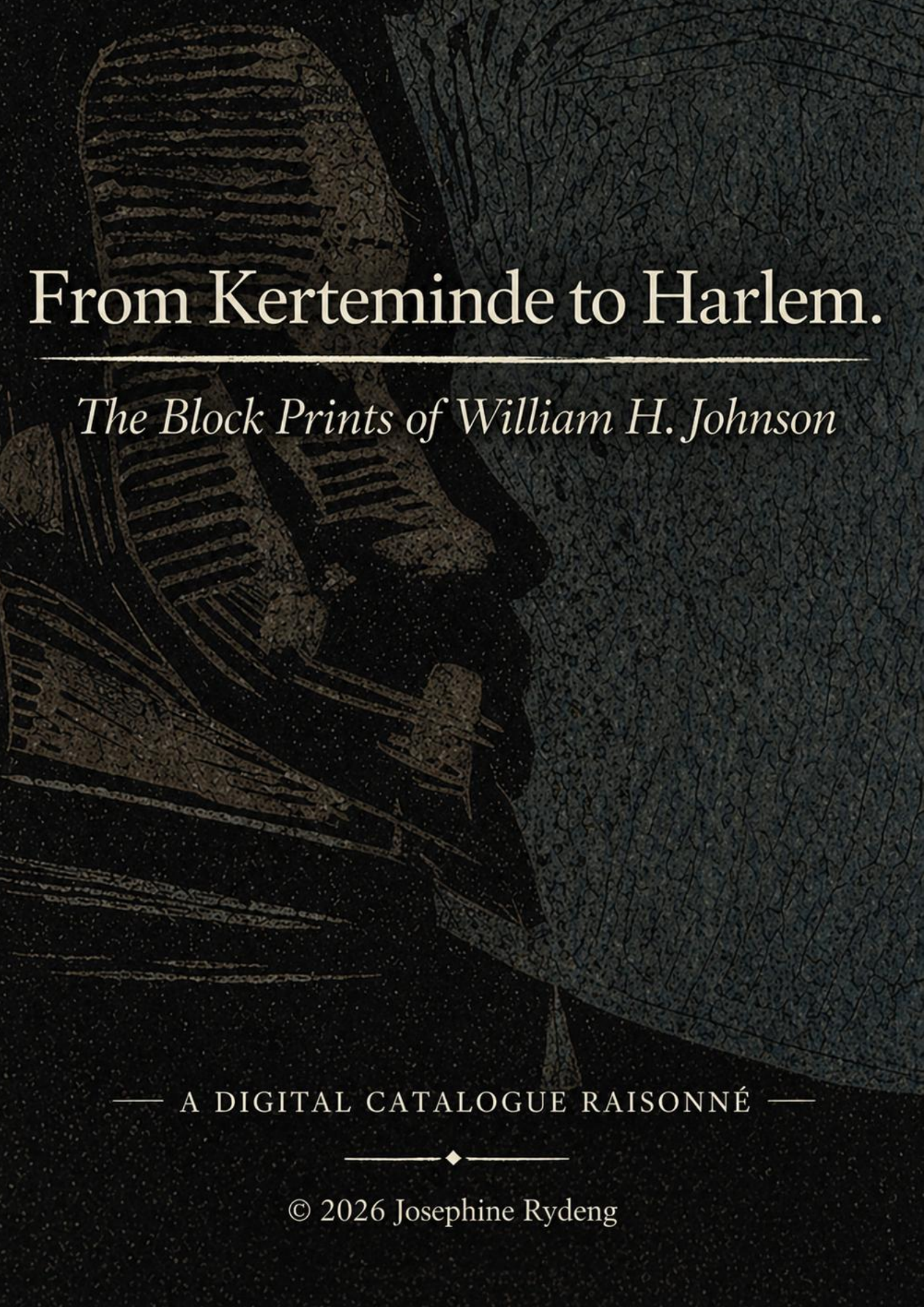

# From Kerteminde to Harlem.

## *The Block Prints of William H. Johnson*

A DIGITAL CATALOGUE RAISONNÉ

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A Digital Catalogue Raisonné

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William H. Johnson Preparing a Silkscreen for Printing, Harlem Community Art Center, New York, July 1942. Photo by Albert Fenn. Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division. Item no. 2017834484.

This digital archive presents a comprehensive survey of William H. Johnson's block prints, bringing together works produced between c. 1932 and 1944 that are now dispersed across museums, public institutions, and private collections in the United States and Scandinavia. Dedicated specifically to Johnson's work in woodcut and linocut, the project documents each print with close attention to provenance, exhibition history, and relevant scholarly references.

By concentrating exclusively on Johnson's block prints, the archive offers a more focused understanding of his engagement with printmaking as both a technical practice and a powerful means of expression. His screen prints, which belong to a distinct phase of his artistic production, are therefore not included and will instead form the subject of a separate future study. This distinction allows for a more precise examination of the material processes, formal experimentation, and expressive qualities that characterize Johnson's work in woodcut and linocut.

Conceived as a freely accessible digital resource by Øbro Kunsthandel, Copenhagen, the archive is intended to serve researchers, artists, and scholars. As an evolving platform, it not only consolidates existing knowledge but also supports ongoing research and the identification of previously undocumented works.

Ultimately, this archive is guided by the conviction that William H. Johnson's graphic work merits sustained scholarly attention and broader recognition. It is hoped that this resource will support ongoing research and encourage future generations to engage with Johnson's work in meaningful and lasting ways.

Collectors, institutions, and individuals with knowledge of or access to block prints attributed to William H. Johnson are warmly invited to contribute to this ongoing archive. Such participation is essential to its broader aim: to preserve, document, and promote Johnson's legacy as a printmaker. Contributions may include information on individual works, provenance details, or images, all of which help build a more complete and accurate record. All information regarding ownership will be treated with the utmost discretion and may remain confidential upon request.

Thank you for supporting this effort to ensure that Johnson's work continues to be recognized, studied, and appreciated by future generations.

Sincerely,

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Introduction.

William H. Johnson in Denmark. Ca. 1930.

William H. Johnson (1901–1970) was an American painter and printmaker whose work is distinguished by vivid landscapes and a sustained engagement with the lives, struggles, and resilience of everyday people. Born in Florence, South Carolina, Johnson spent formative years in Europe between approximately 1926 and 1939, particularly in Scandinavia, where his artistic language evolved toward a more expressive modernist idiom. Following his return to the United States in 1939, he developed the bold, flattened, and highly expressive, folk-inspired style for which he is best known today. In 1947, Johnson suffered a psychiatric breakdown caused by syphilitic paresis and was subsequently institutionalized, effectively ending his artistic career. He spent the final twenty-three years of his life at Central Islip State Hospital on Long Island, where he died in 1970.

Although Johnson regarded himself primarily as a painter, his block prints represent some of his most original and innovative work, despite remaining comparatively understudied. Entirely self-taught as a printmaker and working without professional equipment, Johnson carved his blocks often from scrap wood using standard pocket knives and simple carving gouges. He regularly inked the blocks directly with a paintbrush and printed impressions by hand, transferring the image by firmly burnishing the back of the paper using his palm or the back of a spoon. Johnson also individually hand-colored many impressions, applying color before or after printing so that each pull became a distinct variant. As a result, no two impressions are identical; even when printed from the same block, subtle differences in pressure, inking, and color application ensure that each work exists as a unique object rather than part of a standardized edition.

While some block prints appear to translate painted compositions, perhaps extending the reach and accessibility of his imagery, others seem conceived specifically for the woodblock, where the raw graphic force of carving enabled effects not easily achieved in paint. This direct engagement with the medium reveals Johnson’s sensitivity to material and process, as well as his deep understanding of the expressive possibilities of line, contrast, and simplified form. Together, the prints demonstrate his mastery of printmaking as an independent artistic discipline rather than merely a reproductive technique.

During the late 1930s, Johnson's printmaking entered a new phase of technical and formal experimentation, shaped in part by his access to professional facilities at the Harlem Community Art Center, where he taught between 1939 and 1942. During this period, he began working with linoleum rather than wood, a shift that allowed for finer, more intricate lines in his block prints. He also adopted screen-printing techniques, including pochoir, producing images with a more painterly and varied character. Many of these prints were further enhanced by hand, resulting in subtle variations that make each impression unique.

In contrast to his paintings, which can be more readily organized according to stylistic development, Johnson's block prints resist strict chronological classification. Rather than following a linear progression, they reveal a fluid and iterative approach in which motifs and expressive strategies are revisited and reworked across different moments in his career. This flexibility underscores his experimental engagement with the medium and his willingness to adapt form and technique to shifting artistic concerns, ultimately highlighting a creative process defined by innovation rather than rigid periodization.

As Johnson never dated his works, establishing a precise chronology of his artistic production remains inherently challenging. Within his graphic oeuvre, the earliest identifiable example is a black-and-white self-portrait reproduced on the cover of the catalogue for his exhibition at the Christian Larsen Art Gallery in Copenhagen in April 1933, confirming that the print was produced no later than that date.

Johnson's initial engagement with block printing likely began around 1932, following a three-month stay in Tunisia, North Africa. During this period, he produced a woodblock print of the Mosque of the Sabres based on a watercolor executed during his travels, marking one of the earliest known instances in which he translated a painted composition into relief print.

The year 1932 also marked the beginning of Johnson's experiments with ceramics and pottery, works that were first exhibited at the local library in Kerteminde in October of that year. Both woodcut and ceramics appealed to Johnson through their direct, tactile, and materially expressive qualities. A finished woodcut often preserves the rough texture of the woodgrain, visible gouge marks, and accidental slips of the carving tool, just as a hand-built ceramic vessel retains finger impressions, scrape marks, and uneven glaze drips. In both media, the physical process of making remains visibly embedded within the final object.

Johnson's simultaneous exploration of these raw, hands-on mediums significantly shaped his artistic development during the early 1930s, encouraging an increasingly direct and material approach to form, surface, and expression that would become central to the visual language of his later graphic work.

European Influences and the Formation of Johnson's Graphic Language.

William H. Johnson's years in Europe between 1926 and 1938 proved formative for the development of the graphic language that would come to define his woodcuts. Immersed in the artistic environments of France, Germany, Denmark, and Norway, he encountered German Expressionism and Scandinavian folk traditions, both of which became central to his evolving visual vocabulary. His understanding of Expressionism was likely deepened through his relationship with his Danish wife, Holcha Krake, and her brother-in-law, the German sculptor and graphic artist Christoph Voll, a prominent figure in the Dresden avant-garde associated with the Dresdner Sezession Gruppe 1919 and the so-called second generation of German Expressionists.

Through Krake, Johnson was introduced to Northern European folk art and vernacular traditions. Her own work demonstrated a remarkable ability to preserve age-old craft techniques while simultaneously engaging with the avant-garde currents of Dresden and Berlin. These close personal and artistic connections brought Johnson into contact with important developments in German modernism and encouraged an approach grounded in simplification, expressive form, and emotional directness.

Prior to meeting Krake and Voll in Cagnes-sur-Mer in 1929, Johnson's understanding of modern art appears to have been shaped largely by Parisian movements. Following this encounter, however, his artistic outlook broadened to encompass the major centers of German modernism, Berlin, Dresden, and Munich, as well as the work of artists such as Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Oskar Kokoschka, and Ernst Barlach. The raw, improvisational, and often primitivizing character of their woodcuts finds parallels in Johnson's own graphic practice, particularly in his expressive carving, simplified forms, and emphasis on emotional intensity.

Johnson also expressed admiration for several leading Expressionist printmakers. In a 1934 interview, he spoke of his desire to visit Emil Nolde, and in 1935 he met Edvard Munch in Oslo, an encounter that appears to have intensified his engagement with relief printmaking, as evidenced by a marked increase in his production of block prints thereafter.

Together, these experiences demonstrate how Johnson's printmaking emerged through sustained engagement with European Expressionism. Yet his work ultimately resists simple categorization, transforming these influences into a distinctly personal visual language that bridges European modernism, African diasporic experience, and the vernacular traditions of folk art.

Christoph Voll in his Dresden studio with his wife, Erna Voll, sister of Holcha Krake, ca. 1925. Photograph. Courtesy of the Christoph Voll Estate.

William H. Johnson's meeting with Edvard Munch in Oslo in 1935, facilitated by the Norwegian collector Rolf Stenersen, marked a pivotal moment in his artistic development. At a time when Munch was notably reclusive, the encounter was especially significant. Johnson's connection to Munch was later emphasized by his wife, Holcha Krake, in promoting his work to collectors, critics, and galleries. He also attempted to organize an exhibition of Munch's paintings and prints at the Nierendorf Gallery in New York in 1938. Archival records further indicate that following Johnson's hospitalization in 1947, his possessions included a copy of Gustav Schiefler's Edvard Munch's Graphic Works (1923) and several prints by Munch, likely acquired in connection with their 1935 meeting, demonstrating the lasting influence of the Norwegian master on his artistic development.

Edvard Munch in his studio, circa 1943. Munchmuseet

Although most widely recognized for his iconic paintings, Edvard Munch was also among the most innovative printmakers of the modern era. From his earliest prints, created in Berlin in 1894, to his final works produced in Norway in 1944, printmaking remained integral to his artistic practice. Munch's prints exerted a profound influence on the emerging generation of German Expressionist artists. Characterized by rough cutting, bold contrasts, and pronounced woodgrain textures, his woodcuts introduced a new primitivist expressiveness that powerfully conveyed raw emotion and psychological depth.

Edvard Munch. Young Couple in a Spruce Forest. 1915.
Woodcut with hand-colouring. Munchmuseet

William H. Johnson. Willie and Holcha. Ca. 1932- 1939.
Woodcut with hand-colouring. SAAM.

Max Pechstein. A Village. 1919. Woodcut. VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.

William H. Johnson. Chalets by Jostedal Glacier. Norway. ca. 1935-1937. Woodcut. Blomqvist Auctions

Johnson's first personal encounter with German Expressionist woodcut traditions likely occurred during his travels through Germany with Voll and Krake in 1930, and later during his stay in Hamburg with Krake in 1932, where he may have encountered such works firsthand. It was perhaps through these experiences that Johnson became familiar with the work of Die Brücke, whose artists revolutionized the woodcut by treating it as an experimental medium of expression. Founded in Dresden in 1905 by artists such as Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Max Pechstein, and Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, the group developed a graphic style marked by jagged lines, stark contrasts, and simplified forms, drawing inspiration from African and Oceanic art as well as early German print traditions.

Karl Schmidt-Rottluff. Seated Woman with Flowers. 1913. Woodcut. VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Sertig Road in Winter, Switzerland. 1924. Woodcut. Kunsthalle Bremen.

William H. Johnson. Nude Seated-Front View. ca. 1939-1942. Linocut

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# 1. The Kerteminde Fishermen.

Nestled on the eastern coast of Funen, Kerteminde is one of Denmark's oldest and most enduring fishing communities, long defined by its intimate connection to the sea. During William H. Johnson's residence there (c. 1930–1935), the town, then home to approximately 3,000 inhabitants, was characterized by a tightly knit social structure rooted in maritime tradition. Johnson was warmly received by local fishermen, who affectionately nicknamed him "Willie" and welcomed him into their daily routines, allowing him to observe and occasionally participate in their work. Their directness, modesty, and distinctively Danish dry humor left a lasting impression on the artist, profoundly shaping his understanding of community and inspiring his artistic vision.

Johnson renders these fishermen with a strong sense of social reality, foregrounding their resilience, weathered features, and deep bond with the sea and their community. Stylistically, the works reveal the influence of German Expressionism, evident in simplified forms and boldly exaggerated features that privilege emotional intensity over naturalistic representation.

At the same time, they reflect his sustained interest in working-class subjects and align with his broader engagement with so-called "primitivism." In a 1932 interview, Johnson described the fishermen as "wonderful, primitive people… who have preserved that which is characteristic in their nature; people in whom there is an element of tradition." He later recalled that he had "never worked better than in Kerteminde," where he found both "greater peace" and "better motifs," noting that the fishermen in particular provided "excellent models."

Johnson's fishermen series consists of six individual works.

Portrait Fisherman (Fisherman Jon Due in Yellow-Brimmed Hat), ca. 1932–1935

Jon Fisherman (A), ca. 1932-1935.

Jon Fisherman (B), ca. 1932-1935.

Jon, ca. 1932-1934.

Fisherman (No. 2) ca 1932-1935.

Jon Fisherman (2), ca. 1932-1935.

*Photograph. Kerteminde fishermen at Lillestranden (Little Beach), Denmark c. 1930s. Image courtesy of Iver Due.*

## Portrait Fisherman (Fisherman Jon Due in Yellow-Brimmed Hat), ca. 1932–1935

One known impression.

In this hand-colored woodcut, Johnson depicts a fisherman in a yellow-brimmed hat, where bold carved lines are enriched by expressive color washes. The hat serves as a vivid focal point, standing out against the dark, textured background.

The print was likely derived from the painting Danish Seaman (ca. 1935–1938). Shared elements, including the yellow-brimmed hat, the frontal orientation, and the distinctive facial structure, suggest that the print translates the painted composition into a more graphic and condensed visual language.

In a 1945 letter to his mother-in-law, Johnson identified the fisherman wearing a yellow-brimmed hat in My Memory from Kerteminde, Funen (c. 1945) as Fisker Jon Due. (Fisherman Jon Due). Among the six known prints in Johnson's Kerteminde Fishermen series, three are titled Jon Fisherman or simply Jon. As both the given name Jon and the surname Due were common in Kerteminde, it remains uncertain whether all three prints represent the same individual, namely Jon Due.

Johnson also portrayed the Fisherman Jon Due, distinguished by his yellow-brimmed hat, in several additional paintings and watercolors, including Portrait II (ca. 1930–1932, Smithsonian American Art Museum, 1967.91.2), Fisherman, Kerteminde (ca. 1945, Collection of Steve Turner), and Memory Portrait: Danish Fisherman (ca. 1944–1945, Smithsonian American Art Museum, 1967.59.620). The recurrence of this subject across Johnson's career suggests a sustained personal and artistic engagement. Jon Due appears to function as more than a model, serving instead as a means to explore themes of memory, identity, and regional life.

William H. Johnson, My Memory from Kerteminde, Funen (ca. 1945). Composite of portraits and landscapes from the early 1930s; Jon Due appears in the upper right, second row. SAAM.1967.59.672

William H. Johnson, Danish Seaman, ca. 1934. oil on burlap.SAAM. 1967.59.807

Portrait Fisherman (Fisherman Jon Due in Yellow-Brimmed Hat), ca. 1932–1935. Object Number: WHJ-BP-FSH-0001.Hand-colored block print on paper (Woodcut). Verso: Watercolor on paper. Inscribed on verso: Portrait-Fisherman. Size: 19 1⁄8 x 17 1⁄8 in. (48.5 x 43.5 cm) irregular. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Smithsonian American Art Museum, 1967.59.786R-V. Exhibitions: College Museum. Hampton Institute, March 3-April 14, 1968.  Lot no 28. William H. Johnson, 1901-1970. National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution. November 5, 1971-January 9, 1972.

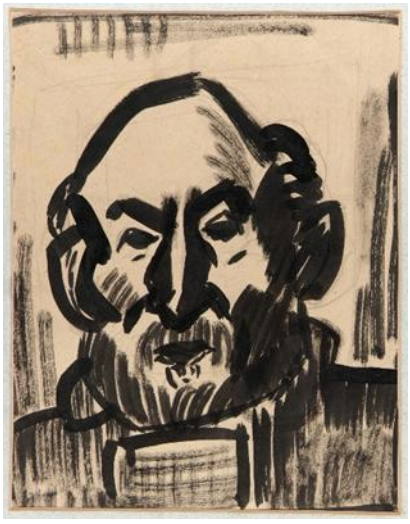
## Jon Fisherman (A), ca. 1932-1935.

One known impression.

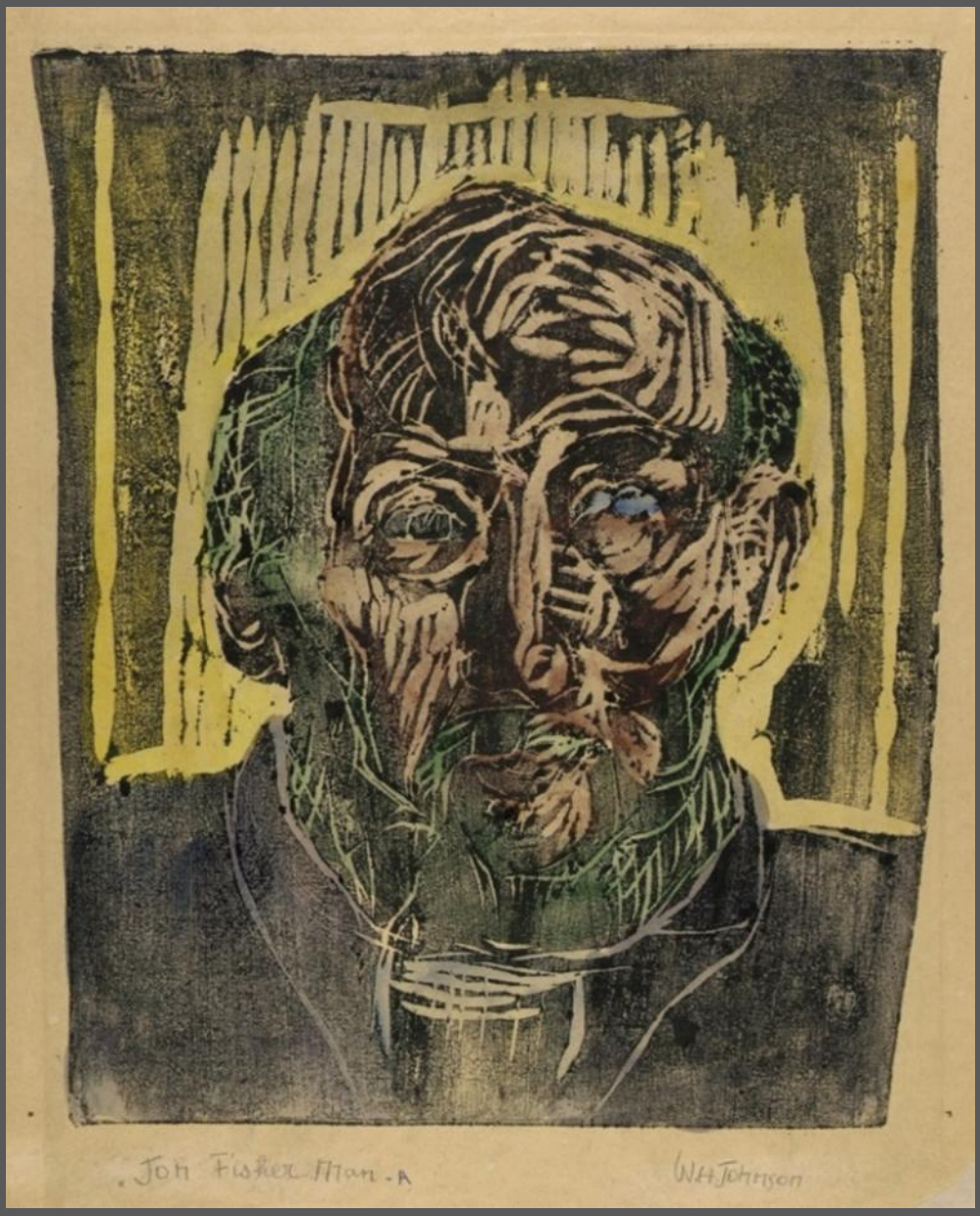
In Jon Fisherman (A), Johnson's vigorous carving and pronounced gouge marks accentuate Jons weathered features, with the forceful incisions evoking a life shaped by physical labor and prolonged exposure to the sea.

Johnson's use of color in the print reflects an expressive, non-naturalistic approach aligned with German Expressionism, in which color carries emotional and symbolic weight. The heightened tones intensify the fisherman's presence, transforming the portrait into a study of endurance and inner strength. Green hues in the hair and beard evoke seaweed and the maritime environment, the yellow background suggests early dawn and the deep blue jacket recalls traditional Danish workwear.

Through this layered palette, Johnson fuses symbolic color with lived experience, balancing expressive intensity with close observation.



Fisherman, ca. 1930–1935. Ink on paper. Possible preparatory sketch for Jon Fisherman (A) and (B). SAAM. 1967.59.837.




Jon Fisherman (A), ca. 1932-1935. Object Number: WHJ-BP-FSH-0002. Block print (woodcut) on paper mounted on paperboard. Size: 15 3⁄4 x 13 1⁄2 in. 40.0 x 34.2 cm. irregular. Titled below image, at right, in graphite: Jon Fisherman (A). Signed at the bottom left of the sheet, in graphite: W.H. Johnson. Hand-colored with a palette of earthy browns, muted greens, deep purples, and yellow accents. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Smithsonian American Art Museum, 1967.59.820

## Jon Fisherman (B), ca. 1932-1935.

One known Impression. Posthumous printed in 1998.

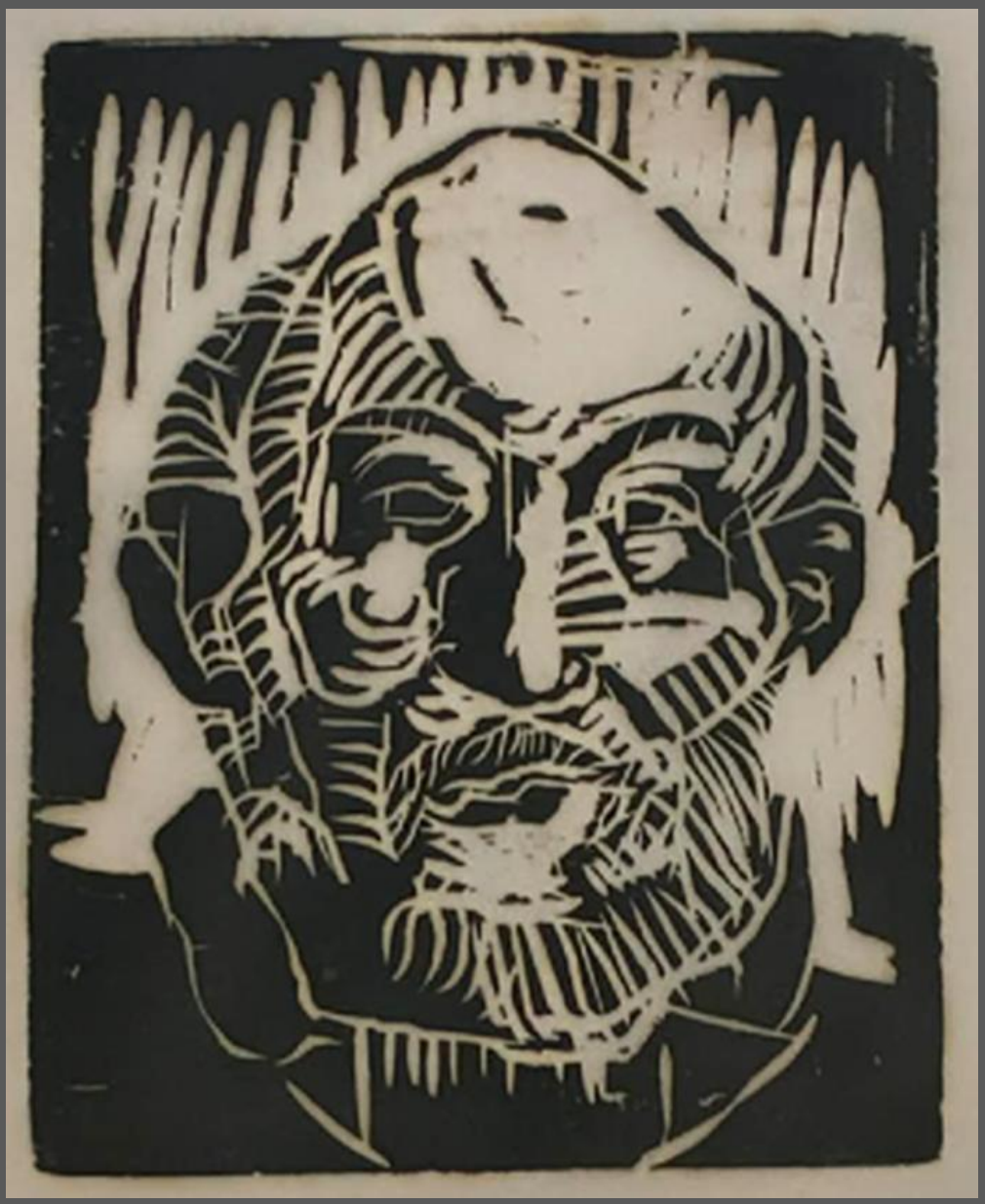
In Jon Fisherman (B), Johnson exploits the interplay of positive and negative space to achieve structural clarity and emotional intensity, while the stark black-and-white contrast underscores the graphic power of the medium.

In contrast to Jon Fisherman (A), the image is more austere and reductive. Its monochrome palette foregrounds Johnson's carving technique, revealing the immediacy and physicality of the woodcut process. The absence of color intensifies the expressive force of the lines and aligns the work more closely with the raw graphic traditions of early twentieth-century Expressionism.

Moreover, unlike in Jon Fisherman (A), where Jon's gaze shifts slightly to the side, his gaze in Jon Fisherman (B) meets the viewer directly, lending the image a heightened sense of immediacy and psychological presence.

No original impressions of Jon Fisherman (B) are known today, suggesting that the block was either never printed or that any early impressions have been lost or remain undiscovered. The sole extant impression is a posthumous print pulled by Hardy Ernst at Fyns Grafiske Værksted, Odense, in 1998.

William H. Johnson. Jon Fisherman (B). Ca. 1932-1935. Carved wooden printing block with inlaid chalk. Size, 26 x 20 cm. Johannes Larsen Museet.



William H. Johnson. Jon Fisherman (B). ca. 1932–1935. Object Number: WHJ-BP-FSH-0003. Size, 32 × 41 cm. Woodcut from the original block; posthumous impression printed by Hardy Ernst, Fyns Grafiske Værksted, Odense, 1998. Johannes Larsen Museet.

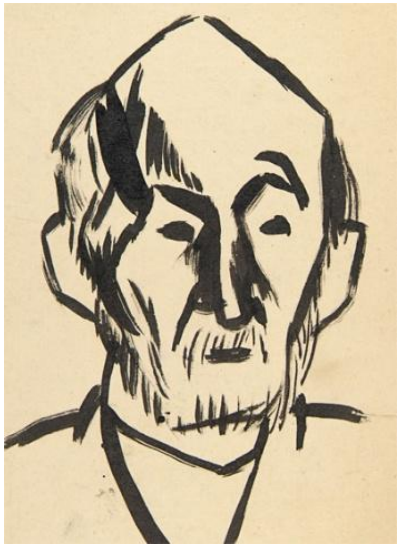
## Jon, ca. 1932-1934.

Three known impressions.

In this portrait, Johnson depicts Jon in a three-quarter view, rendering his features through angular, simplified forms. Bold, incised lines articulate the brow and nose, while deep shadows carve out the cheeks and eyes, intensifying a sense of rugged endurance. Jon's gaze turns slightly away from the viewer, avoiding direct engagement and suggesting a mind absorbed elsewhere.

According to accounts by the grandson of one of the Kerteminde fishermen portrayed by Johnson, the fishermen were willing to pose but disliked sitting still for extended periods. This context deepens the interpretation of Jons averted gaze, suggesting a quiet restlessness and implying that he endures the sitting with restrained impatience rather than actively participating in the process of being portrayed.

The earliest documented reference to the print dates to December 1934, when Johnson presented an impression to the Danish photographer Thomas Pedersen in exchange for photographs taken of Johnson and his work at Århus Kunstbygning on 10–11 December 1934.



Portrait of a Man, ca. 1930–1935. Ink on paper. Possible preparatory sketch for Jon. SAAM., 1967.59.91.

Jon, ca. 1932-1934. Object Number: WHJ-BP-FSH-0004. Block print on light tan wove paper. (Woodcut). Size:  294 x 223 mm; 11 5/8 x 8 7/8 inches. Titled below image, at right, in graphite: Jon; signed at the bottom left: W.H. Johnson. Provenance: Gifted in 1934 to Thomas Pedersen. Aarhus. Exhibited: Nyere Grafik Fra En Århusiansk Privatsamling. Århus Kunstforening. 1972. Lot no 72. Illustrated and catalogued as no. 33 in William H. Johnson: Truth Be Told by Steve Turner and Victoria Dailey (1996)

Jon, ca. 1932-1934. Object Number: WHJ-BP-FSH-0005. Block print on wove paper. (Woodcut ) sheet: 29.4 x 22.3 cm. (11.6 x 8.8 in. Titled below image, at right, in graphite: Jon; signed at the bottom left of the sheet, in graphite: W.H. Johnson. Exhibit label applied to backing verso from Steve Turner Gallery, Los Angeles, CA, William H. Johnson - Truth Be Told.

Jon, ca. 1932-1934. Object Number: WHJ-BP-FSH-0006. Block print on paper. (Woodcut). Size: 13 7⁄8 x 11 1⁄4 in. (35.1 x 28.5 cm). Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Smithsonian American Art Museum, 1967.59.822

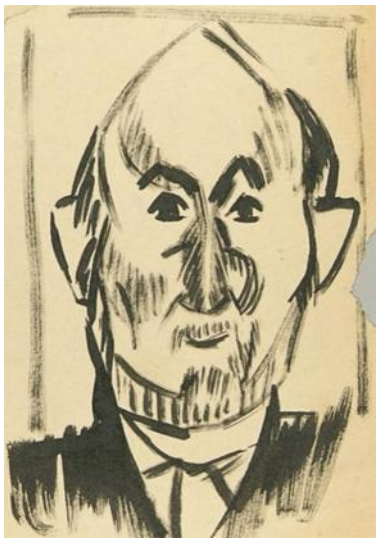
## Fisherman (No. 2) ca 1932-1935.

Two known impressions.

In Fisherman (No. 2), Johnson presents a stark, frontal depiction of an elderly fisherman, rendered through bold contrasts and expressive carving. The features are strongly emphasized, a broad, rounded nose, deep-set eyes, and a pronounced mustache articulated through short, repetitive cuts.

The vigorous, uneven lines give the surface a rough, tactile quality that evokes both the physicality of the carving process and the sitter's weathered appearance. The title Fisherman (No. 2) suggests a series, though only this version is currently known.

In contrast to Johnson's woodcuts of Jon (WHJ-BP-FSH-0004–0006), the fisherman's gaze here meets the viewer directly. His expression is imbued with a gentle, almost jovial presence, suggesting a more relaxed sitter who appears at ease with being portrayed.



Fisherman, ca. 1930–1935. Ink on paper. Possible preparatory sketch for Fisherman (No. 2). SAAM. 1967.59.90.

Fisherman (No. 2), ca. 1932-1935. Object Number: WHJ-BP-FSH-0007. Block print on paper. (Woodcut). Inscribed Fisherman # 2 on verso. Size: 13 1⁄2 x 11 1⁄8 in. (34.3 x 28.3 cm) irregular, Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation, Smithsonian American Art Museum, 1967.59.823

Fisherman (No. 2) ca. 1932-1935. Object Number: WHJ-BP-FSH-0007. Block print on paper. (Woodcut). Size: (27 x 20 cm) Provenance: Estate of Holcha Krake; thence by descent to her grandniece, Johanna Voll. Private collection.

## Jon Fisherman (2), ca. 1932-1935.

Four known impressions.

In Jon Fisherman (2), Johnson transcends conventional portraiture, presenting Jon as a monumental and symbolic figure. The face is constructed from bold, symmetrical forms that transform his features, a broad nose, circular eyes, and pronounced ears, into a mask-like configuration

The print was likely derived from the painting Red-Nosed Old Salt (ca. 1930–1938), where the sitter appears seated before a small portrait of a sailing ship. In the woodcut, Johnson adds both the ship and a rising sun, situating Jon within his maritime milieu while evoking themes of labor, endurance, and renewal.

With the addition of color, the composition takes on a markedly different character. The bold black contours are intensified, and the segmented planes of the face resemble pieces of colored glass set within lead, creating a stained-glass effect.

The designation “2” in the title suggests a possible series, though only one version is currently known.

William H. Johnson, Red Nosed Old Salt, ca. 1931-1938. Oil on burlap. SAAM. 1967.59.808

Jon Fisherman (2), ca. 1932-1935. Object Number: WHJ-BP-FSH-0008. Block print on paper mounted on paperboard. (woodcut). Titled below image, at right, in graphite: Jon Fisherman (2). Signed at the bottom left of the sheet, in graphite: W.H. Johnson. Hand-colored with a palette of ochre, burnt orange, and olive green for the face and beard, with accents of violet, sky blue, and green in the background. Size: 11 5⁄8 x 12 1⁄8 in. 29.5 x 30.7 cm. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation, Smithsonian American Art Museum, 1967.59.821

Jon Fisherman (2), ca. 1932-1935. Object Number: WHJ-BP-FSH-0009. Block print on paper. (Woodcut). Titled Jon Fisherman (2). Signed in graphite: W.H. Johnson. Annotated Dal-533-(2). Inscribed on verso: Til Holcha fra Willie. Hand-colored with a palette of mustard yellow, deep red, olive green, and black for the face and clothing, set against a muted lavender and grey background with accents of white. Provenance: Harmon Foundation, Inc. Records. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, www.loc.gov/item/2003688148.

Jon Fisherman (2), ca. 1932-1935. Object Number: WHJ-BP-FSH-0010. Block print on paper. (Woodcut). Size: H: 11 ¾ in. W: 11 ¾ in. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Hampton University Museum & Archives. Accession no: 67.44.3

Jon Fisherman (2), ca. 1932-1935. Object Number: WHJ-BP-FSH-0011. Block print on paper. (Woodcut). Size: 16"h x 14⅞"w x 1⅛"d. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Fisk University Galleries. Accession no. #0417

# 2. Portraits.

## Man in Glasses, ca. 1932-1935

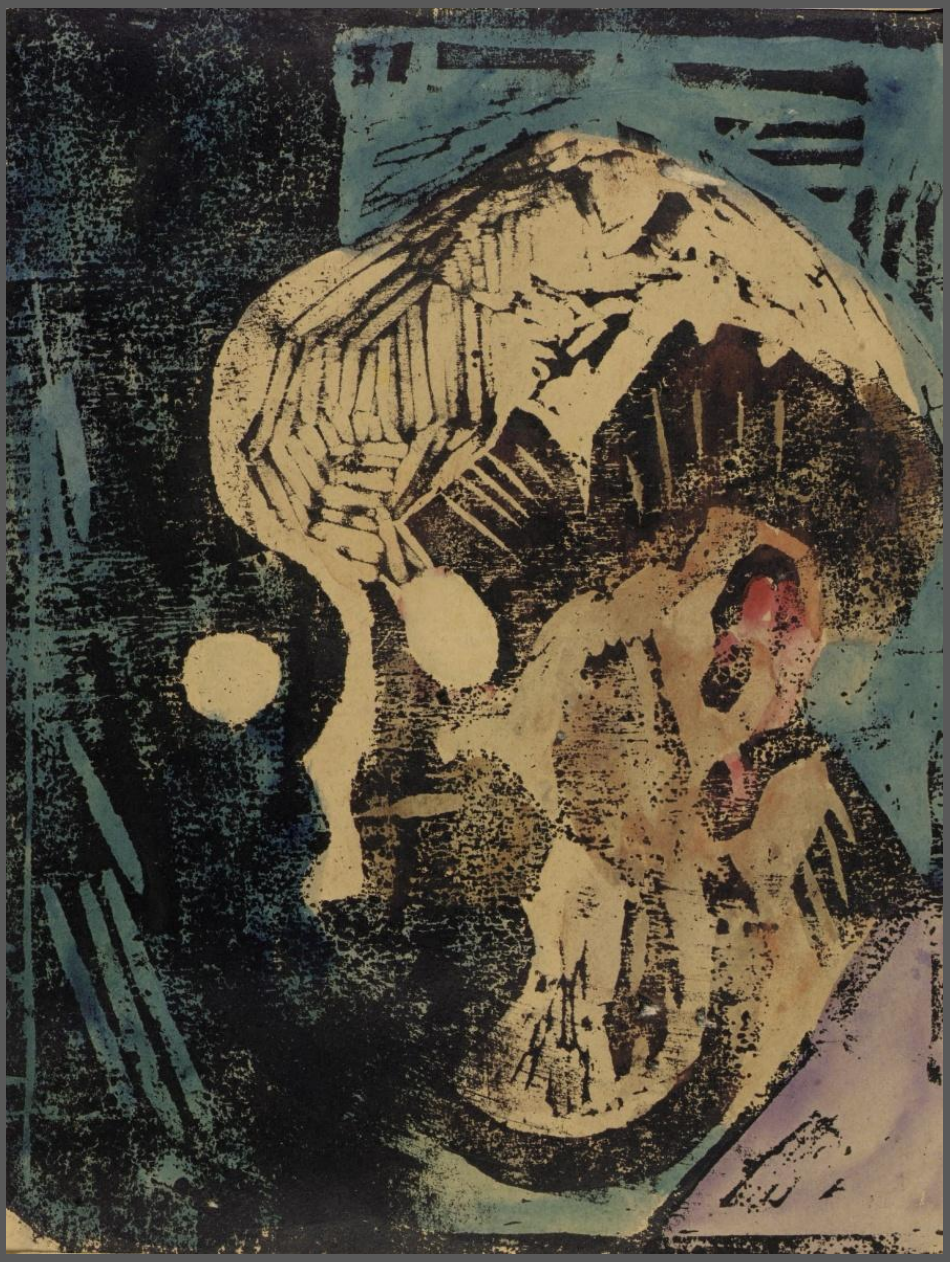
One known impression.

In Man in Glasses, Johnson employs a style closely related to Fisherman Jon Due in Yellow-Brimmed Hat (WHJ-BP-FSH-0001) In both works, the face is constructed from fractured planes and ambiguous spatial relationships, shaped by a vigorous interplay of carving and inking.

Rather than striving for conventional likeness, Johnson embraces formal experimentation to convey psychological depth and an introspective presence.

Although the sitter's identity remains unconfirmed, it is likely that he was a local resident of Kerteminde.

Portrait of a Man with Glasses, ca. 1930–1935. Possible preparatory sketch. Ink on paper. SAAM. 1967.59.101R-V



Man in Glasses, ca. 1932-1935. Object Number: WHJ-BP-POR-0001. Block print on paper mounted on paperboard. (Woodcut) Hand-colored with a muted palette of beige, deep teal, and black, with subtle touches of lavender, soft rose, and reddish-brown accenting the ear and lower face. Size: 10 1⁄4 x 7 1⁄2 in. 26.0 x 19.1 cm. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Smithsonian American Art Museum, 1967.59.756

## Portrait I, ca. 1932-1938.

One known impression.

In Portrait I, Johnson renders a well-dressed young man through incisive carving characteristic of German Expressionism, employing bold simplification, exaggerated form, and emotionally charged line.

The composition is marked by forceful, economical cuts that heighten the sitter's expressive intensity. Hollowed eye sockets, an elongated nose, and prominently protruding ears contribute to a mask-like severity. The wide, heavily outlined eyes confront the viewer directly, their steady, penetrating gaze reinforcing the portrait's psychological depth and introspective tension.

Portrait I, ca. 1932-1938. Object Number: WHJ-BP-POR-0002. Woodcut on paper, sheet: 13 3⁄4 x 10 5⁄8 in. (35.0 x 27.0 cm). Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Smithsonian American Art Museum,1967.59.973

## Portrait II, ca. 1932–1938.

Two known impressions.

In Portrait II, Johnson depicts a male figure who appears older than the subject of Portrait I. Executed in Johnsons expressionist manner, the print is marked by deeply incised lines, exaggerated facial features, and a pronounced sense of emotional gravity.

The sitter's high forehead, pronounced eyebrows, and distinctive mustache closely resemble those of Niels Lindberg, whose portrait Johnson painted in 1933 to mark the opening of the Filosoffen exhibition hall in Odense, an institution Lindberg helped establish.

Another plausible identification is the mayor of Kerteminde, whom Johnson included in his group composition Min Minde Fra Kerteminde Fyn, 1930 (My Memory from Kerteminde, Funen), executed in 1945. Both figures played significant roles in Johnson's Danish experience and may have served as subjects during this printmaking period.

Although the Smithsonian American Art Museum dates the print to 1935–1938, the above evidence suggests an earlier execution, possibly from around from 1932–1938.

*Niels Lindberg (1886–1974) was a Danish painter, collector, and early patron of William H. Johnson. As chairman of the Association of Funen Artists from 1928 to 1933, he played an active role in the Danish art scene and co-founded the exhibition space Filosoffen in Odense in 1933. In 1938, Lindberg was instrumental in organizing an exhibition featuring works by both Johnson and Holcha Krake. He also owned the paint supply store Nørre Broby Malerforretning (1912–1939), through which he developed a close relationship with the artists and assembled an important collection of their work. Photograph of Niels Lindberg, ca. 1930s. Credit: Helle Brink.*

Portrait II, ca. 1932-1938.  Object Number: WHJ-BP-POR-0003. Woodcut on paper, sheet: 13 3⁄4 x 10 7⁄8 in. (34.8 x 27.7 cm) Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation, Smithsonian American Art Museum, 1967.59.974

Portrait II, ca. 1932-1938. Woodcut on paper. Object Number: WHJ-BP-POR-0004. Size (34 x 27 cm). Provenance: The estate of Holcha Krake; by descent to her grandniece, Johanna Voll. Christoph Voll Estate collection.

# 3. Self-Portraits.

William H. Johnson's self-portraits occupy a central place within his graphic practice, functioning as a powerful vehicle for both personal reflection and artistic inquiry. In these works, Johnson confronts questions of identity and self-representation, exploring not only how he understood himself but also how he wished to be seen by others.

Printmaking, especially woodcut, plays a crucial role in this process. Unlike drawing or painting, the creation of a woodcut self-portrait is both physically demanding and psychologically intense, requiring the artist to occupy the dual role of subject and maker. The medium demands direct carving into the surface, with each cut permanently embedded in the final image. The slow and resistant process of carving compels sustained concentration and self-examination, while the toughness of the wood grain resists spontaneous gestures, often producing a more raw, direct, and emotionally charged form of expression.

In Johnson's self-portraits, the carved lines and gouged surfaces retain the visible trace of the artist's hand, making the act of creation inseparable from the final composition. Whether rendered in stark black and white or enhanced with subtle hand-applied color, these works reveal Johnson's sustained engagement with identity, memory, and the evolving role of the artist, while emphasizing the expressive and material possibilities of the woodcut medium itself.

Johnson's self-portrait series consists of eight individual works.

Self-Portrait (Christian Larsen Catalogue Cover, 1933)

Selvportret (Self-Portrait) ca. 1932-1935.

Self Portrait. ca. 1932-1935.

Self-Portrait. (Self-Portrait with Yellow Background). ca. 1932-1935.

Self-Portrait. (Self-Portrait with Beret) ca. 1932-1935.

Self-Portrait. (Self-Portrait in Blue Shirt), ca. 1932-1935.

Just Me. Selvportret. ca, 1935-1938.

Willie and Holcha (Double Portrait). ca. 1932-1939.



*Photograph of William H. Johnson, ca 1929-1930. Image credit: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.*

## Self-Portrait (Christian Larsen Catalogue Cover, 1933)

One known impression.

Johnson's earliest identifiable work within his graphic oeuvre is a self-portrait reproduced on the cover of the catalogue for his exhibition at the Christian Larsen Art Gallery in Copenhagen in April 1933, already demonstrating a remarkable command of the woodcut medium.

The composition is structured through a dynamic interplay of carved and uncarved surfaces. The white areas mark where Johnson has cut into the woodblock, transforming absence into a defining visual element. Long linear passages carved around the head create a stark framing device that isolates and intensifies the face, directing the viewer's attention inward.

Rather than striving for naturalistic likeness, Johnson foregrounds the physical act of carving itself. Bold incisions, sharp contrasts, and deliberate distortions generate a forceful and emotionally charged image that aligns the work with Expressionist aesthetics while emphasizing the materiality and process of its making.

Chr. Larsen
Kunsthandel
Højbroplads 9 II
Malerier af bedste dancke Kunstnere, saavel ældre som nulevende, i stort Udvalg.
Broncer af Kai Nielsen, Gauguin, Bjerg m. fl.
Lærred og Kunstnerfarver i fine Kvaliteter.
maleriudstilling
af den amerikanske maler
WILLIAM H. JOHNSON
NEW YORK
hos chr. larsen, højbroplads 9 2.
dagl. kl. 9-6 søndag kl. 11-4 — tlf. byen 3369
April 1933

Exhibition catalogue for William H. Johnson's April 1933 exhibition at Chr. Larsen Kunsthandel, Højbro Plads, Copenhagen. Cover text: Painting Exhibition by the American painter William H. Johnson, New York, at Chr. Larsen, Højbro Plads 9, open daily 9 a.m.–6 p.m., Sundays 11 a.m.–4 p.m.

Self-Portrait (Christian Larsen Exhibition Cover)  1933. Object Number: WHJ-BP-SP-0001. Block print on paper ( Woodcut) Size: 11 3⁄8 x 8 1⁄8 in. (29.0 x 20.5 cm). Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Smithsonian American Art Museum, 1967.59.796.

## Selvportret (Self-Portrait) ca. 1932-1935.

Three known impressions.

In Selvportret (Self-Portrait), Johnson depicts himself in a three-quarter view, his head turned slightly to the viewer's left. Unlike the sharply linear structure of his earlier 1933 self-portrait, the carving here appears more fluid and painterly, suggesting a freer and more spontaneous approach to the woodblock.

Rather than confronting the viewer directly, Johnson's gaze turns away, lending the image a quiet introspective character and suggesting a deeper examination of his emotional and psychological state rather than a straightforward presentation of likeness.

Only one of the three known impressions bears the title selvportret written in a hybrid English-Danish form that Johnson also employed in the woodblock Just Me, Selvportret (WHJ-BP-SP-00017).

Selvportret (Self-Portrait) ca. 1932-1935. Object Number: WHJ-BP-SP-0002. Block print on pale cream wove paper. ( Woodcut). Signed at the bottom left: W.H. Johnson. Titled below image: Selvportret. Size: 8 7/8 x 8 7/8 in. (22.5 x 22.5 cm). Provenance: private collection, Denmark to 2005. Sold at Swann Auction Galleries. African-American Fine Art. Feb 19, 2008 - Sale 2136. Lot 16

Selvportret (Self-Portrait) ca. 1932-1935. Object Number: WHJ-BP-SP-0003.Block print on paper. (Woodcut). Size: 8 3/4 x 9 in. (22,225 x 22.86 cm). Provenance: Gift of the Philadelphia Commercial Museum. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Accession no: 2004.13.7

Selvportret (Self-Portrait) ca. 1932-1935. Object Number: WHJ-BP-SP-0004. Block print on paper. (Woodcut). Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Courtesy of Oakland Museum of California (OMCA). Accession no: A67.62.18

## Self-Portrait. ca. 1932-1935.

Seven known impressions.

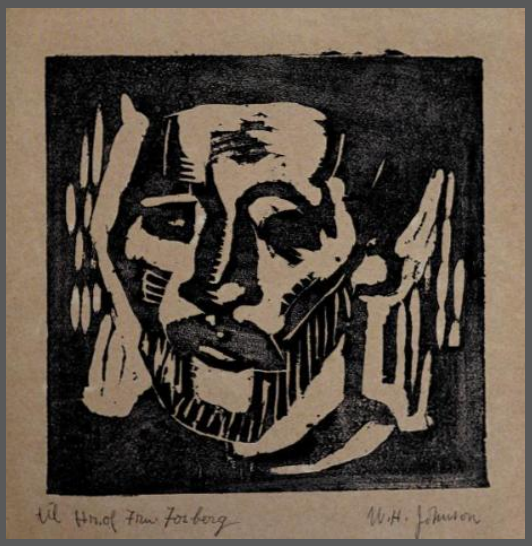
In Self-Portrait, Johnson reduces the face to an arrangement of carved and uncarved forms, creating a highly simplified and expressive image. The eyes appear dark and hollowed, while the asymmetrical carving and rough surface textures heighten the work's psychological intensity. Visible woodgrain and uneven inking further emphasize the material qualities of the block, reinforcing the raw and immediate character of the composition.

The earliest recorded reference to the print dates to October 1934, when Johnson sold an impression to Ingrid Marie Nielsen, manager of the hostel Højskolehjemmet in Esbjerg, where he and Holcha Krake were staying in connection with their joint exhibition at the Esbjerg Library that same month.

A subsequent reference appears in March 1935, when Johnson sold another impression to Sverre Forberg (1891–1974), a Norwegian civil servant in the Department of Agriculture, and his wife, Gunvor, during his participation in a two-person exhibition with the Norwegian painter Olaf Fjelldahl at Blomqvist Gallery in Oslo.

Self-Portrait. ca. 1932-1935. Object Number: WHJ-BP-SP-0005. Block print on paper. (Woodcut). Size: 11 5⁄8 x 11 3⁄4 in. (29.5 x 29.8 cm) Provenance: Gift of Mrs. Douglas E. Younger. (Assistant Director at the Harmon Foundation). Smithsonian American Art Museum, 1971.140.

Self-Portrait. October 1934. Object Number: WHJ-BP-SP-0006. Block print on paper. (Woodcut). Signed W.H. Johnson. Dedicated in Danish Til Frk. Ingrid Nielsen fra W.H. Johnson. Size: ( 23.5 x 25.5 cm). Provenance: Ingrid Marie Nielsen, manager of the Højskolehjemmet hostel, Esbjerg; acquired October 1934 as part of the purchase of a ceramic bowl decorated and signed by William H. Johnson. Subsequently in the collection of Vejen Art Museum, Denmark.



Self-Portrait. March 1935. Object Number: WHJ-BP-SP-0007. Block print on paper. (Woodcut). Signed W.H. Johnson at lower right. Inscribed at lower left: Til Hr. Og Fru. Forsberg. To Mr and Mrs Forsberg. ( 11 ½ x 11 ½ inches). Provenance: Sverre Forsberg, by decent in the family until 1996. Illustrated and catalogued as no. 32 in William H. Johnson: Truth Be Told by Steve Turner and Victoria Dailey (1996)

Self-Portrait. ca. 1932-1935. Object Number: WHJ-BP-SP-0008. Block print on paper. (Woodcut). Signed W.H. Johnson. Size: H: 20 ½ in. W: 19 ½ in. D: 2 in. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Hampton University Museum & Archives. Accession no: 67.44.2

Self-Portrait. ca. 1932-1935. Object Number: WHJ-BP-SP-0009. Block print on paper. (Woodcut). Size: 15"h x 16"w x 1⅛"d. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Fisk University Galleries. Accession no: #0408

Self-Portrait. ca. 1932-1935. Object Number: WHJ-BP-SP-00010. Hand-colored block print on paper (Woodcut). Size: 25"h x 22"w x 1"d. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Fisk University Galleries. Accession no: #0416

Self-Portrait. ca. 1932-1935. Object Number: WHJ-BP-SP-00011. Hand-colored block print on paper (Woodcut). Signed in pencil on verso. Annotated: “til Holcha fra Willie”; “DAL-377-2.” Retrieved from the Library of Congress. www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2003688153/

William H. Johnson, portrait photograph by Thomas Pedersen, 10 Dec. 1934. Original courtesy of photographer Poul Pedersen, Aarhus.

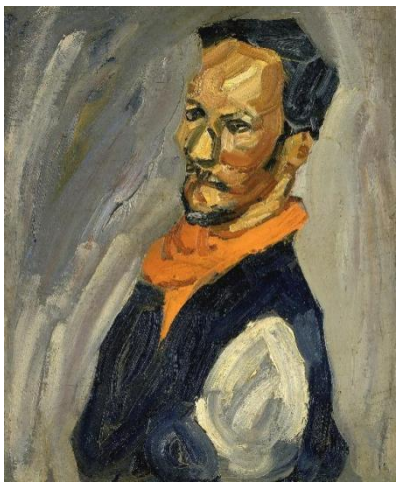
## Self-Portrait. (Self-Portrait with red bandana). Ca. 1932-1935.

One known impression.

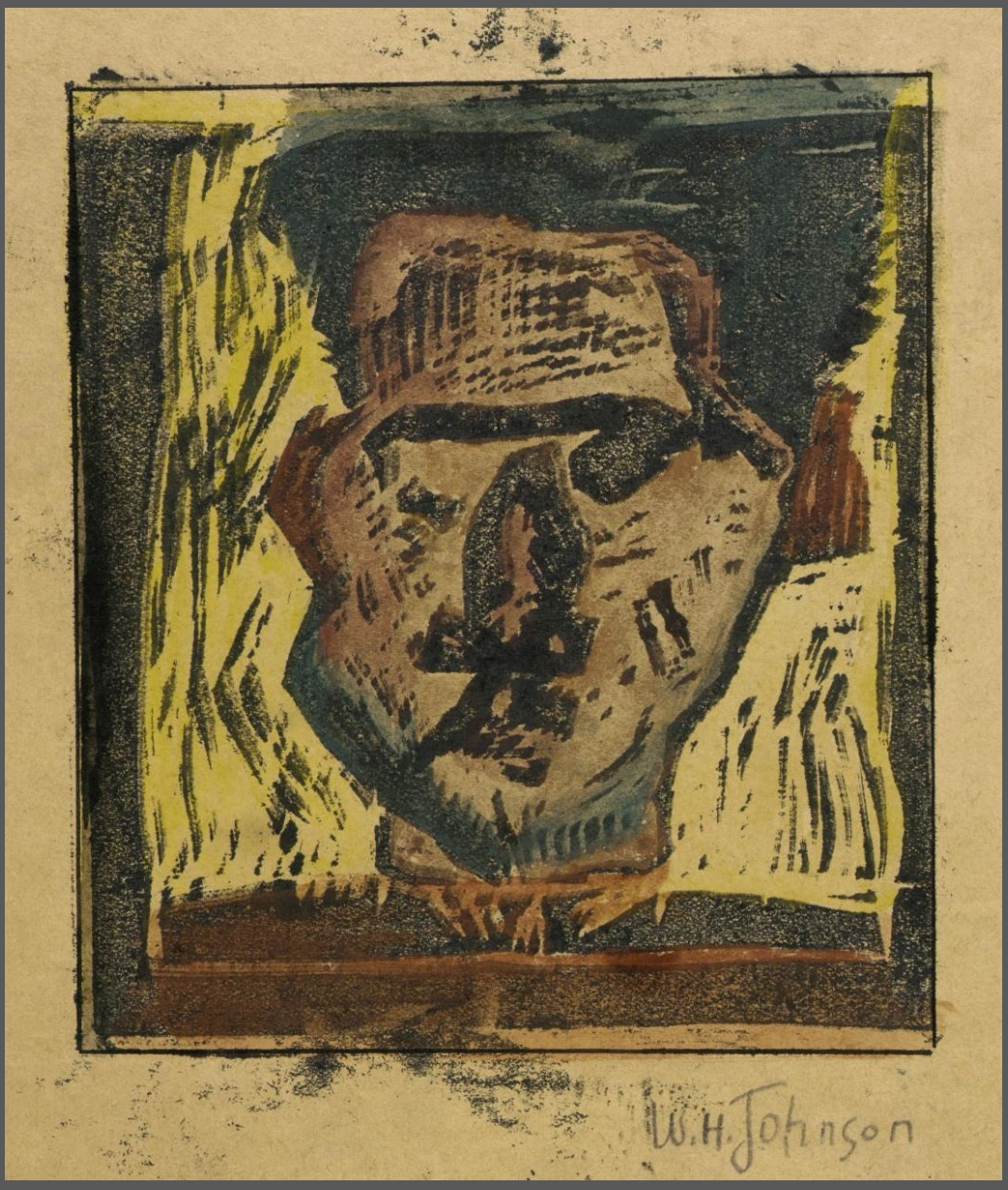
In Self-Portrait (Self-Portrait with Red Bandana), Johnson presents a frontal and symmetrical view of his face that directly confronts the viewer. The composition is constructed through angular planes, rough gouge marks, and fragmented facial features that emerge from the dark surface of the woodblock. Heavy shadowing around the eyes and nose gives the face a mask-like quality, while the uneven contours and asymmetrical carving heighten the portrait's emotional intensity and introspective character.

The hand-applied color further amplifies the work's expressive force. A vivid yellow background contrasts sharply with the warmer brown tones modeling the cheeks and ears, strengthening the structural clarity of the face while enhancing its psychological presence..

A small flash of red at the neckline likely represents Johnson's characteristic bandana, a recurring motif in his self-portraits from this period that subtly reinforces his carefully constructed artistic identity.



*William H. Johnson. Self-Portrait with Bandana, ca. 1935-1938. Oil on burlap. Smithsonian American Art Museum 1967.59.936*




Self-Portrait. (Self-Portrait with red bandana). Ca. 1932-1935. Object Number: WHJ-BP-SP-00012. Hand colored block print on paper. (Woodcut). Size: 9 1⁄8 x 8 1⁄8 in. (23.3 x 20.5 cm). Signed at the bottom right in graphite: W.H. Johnson. Smithsonian American Art Museum, 1967.59.795

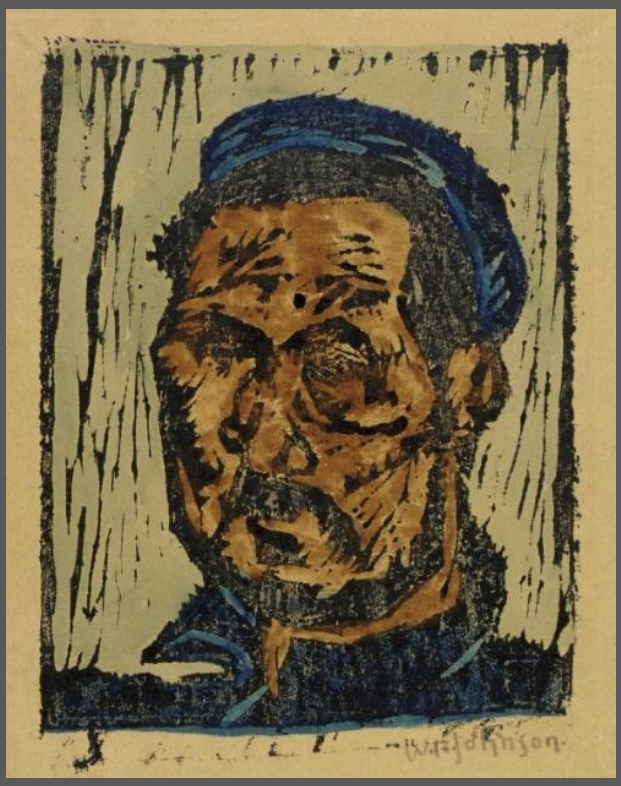
## Self-Portrait. (Self-Portrait with Beret) ca. 1932-1935.

Four known impressions.

In Self-Portrait (Self-Portrait with Beret), Johnson presents himself in three-quarter view wearing a blue beret and matching fisherman's jacket, constructing a carefully fashioned image of the modern artist. The face emerges through dense black forms and sharply carved highlights, while visible woodgrain and rough gouge marks intensify the portrait's expressive and emotionally charged character.

The beret, famously associated with Rembrandt and later adopted more broadly by artists, intellectuals and political radicals, had by the nineteenth century, become a recognizable emblem of creative and bohemian identity. Johnson was frequently photographed wearing a beret during both his European years and later in the United States in the 1940s, suggesting that it functioned not merely as a personal stylistic choice but as a deliberate marker of his identity as a modern artist.

Reproduction of Rembrandt van Rijn's Self-Portrait, Leaning on a Stone Sill (1639), reproduced in William H. Johnson's scrapbook (ca. 1930–1947). The image presents Rembrandt in a beret with composed assurance and a self-fashioned image of success. Courtesy of the Florence County Museum.



Self-Portrait. (Self-Portrait with Beret) ca. 1932-1935. Object Number: WHJ-BP-SP-00013. block print on paper (Woodcut). Hand-colored in warm browns and ochres with deep blue accents in the cap and clothing. Signed at the bottom right in graphite: W.H. Johnson. Size:  9 5⁄8 x 8 in. (24.3 x 20.3 cm). Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Smithsonian American Art Museum, 1967.59.797

Self-Portrait. (Self-Portrait with Beret) ca. 1932-1935. Object Number: WHJ-BP-SP-00014. block print on paper (Woodcut). Annotated: DAL-387.Provenance: Civic Center Museum Collection, African American Museum in Philadelphia. Accession no: 2010.001.401

Self-Portrait. (Self-Portrait with Beret) ca. 1932-1935. Object Number: WHJ-BP-SP-00015. Block print on paper (Woodcut). Size: 13.5 x 10 in. (34.29 x 25.4 cm). Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Courtesy of the Amistad Research Center, New Orleans, La. Accession no: ARC.HAR.WHJO.1934.17.

Self-Portrait. (Self-Portrait with Beret) ca. 1932-1935. Object Number: WHJ-BP-SP-00016. Block print on paper (Woodcut). Height 30 cm; Width 24cm. Provenance: Estate of Holcha Krake; thence by descent to her grandniece, Johanna Voll. Christoph Voll Estate collection.

William H. Johnson wearing a beret in Kerteminde, Denmark, ca. 1930s (left), and in New York, ca. 1945 (top). Image credit: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution

## Self-Portrait. (Self-Portrait in blue jacket), ca. 1932-1935.

One known impression.

In Self-Portrait (Self-Portrait in Blue Jacket), Johnson constructs his image through carved lines, angular planes, and fragmented forms that simplify and distort the face. Shown frontally and tightly compressed within the picture plane, the portrait is dominated by heavy shadowing around the eyes and upper face. Rough gouge marks and visible woodgrain remain clearly apparent, emphasizing the direct and physical nature of the carving process.

The persistent visibility of the cuts reinforces the material presence of the woodblock, so that the portrait functions not only as an image of the self but also as a tangible record of its own making.

Johnson wears a traditional blue fisherman's jacket, a garment associated with Danish maritime life and valued for its warmth when wet and practical dark coloring suited to work at sea. Similar jackets appear throughout his Kerteminde fisherman portraits, suggesting an identification with working-class life and the rural Scandinavian communities that became central to his artistic imagination during the 1930s.

Self-Portrait. (Self-Portrait in blue jacket), ca. 1932-1935. Object Number: WHJ-BP-SP-00017.  hand-colored block print on paper. ( Woodcut). Size: 14 1⁄8 x 14 in. (35.8 x 35.5 cm) irregular. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Smithsonian American Art Museum, 1967.59.791.

## Just Me- Selvportret ca, 1935-38.

In Just Me – Selvportret, Johnson represents himself as a solitary silhouetted figure positioned within a narrow vertical format, recognizable through his characteristic wide-brimmed hat and long overcoat. Standing alone, his hands likely tucked into his pockets, the figure conveys a quiet sense of introspection.

The title Just Me establishes an introspective framework for the image. While seemingly modest in tone, it may also be understood as a quiet assertion of selfhood, an affirmation of presence, individuality, and autonomy. This ambiguity reflects Johnson's complex position as both participant and observer, insider and outsider, within the cultural and artistic environments he inhabited. Created during his time in rural Scandinavia, likely in Volda, the work resonates with themes of isolation and identity. As one of the very few people of color living in 1930s Norway, and indeed across much of Scandinavia, Johnson occupied a highly visible and singular position within the local community, a condition that informs the image's reflective tone.

The decision to depict himself from behind, emphasizing posture and attire rather than facial expression, may also function as a subtle homage to Johnson's favored writer, the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen, who was often caricatured from behind to evoke his stern, iconic presence. Here, Johnson similarly constructs a figure that is at once solitary and symbolic.

No original impressions of Just Me – Selvportret are known, suggesting the block was either never printed or that early impressions have been lost or remain undiscovered. The only extant impression is a posthumous trial print from the original woodblock, pulled by Øbro Kunsthandel, Copenhagen, 2026.

Caricature of Johnson at Grønningen exhibition, Copenhagen, January 1935, depicting the artist in his signature wide-brimmed hat and long overcoat. Credit: Dagens Nyheder, Smithsonian Institution

Just Me,Selvportret, ca. 1935–38. Carved woodblock with ink, titled and signed verso. 12 x 4 ½ cm. Provenance: the artist to Niels Lindberg, Nr. Broby, Funen; private Danish collection.

Henrik Ibsen, circa 1895. Caricature by Gustav Laerum. Photo by Hulton

William H. Johnson.  Just Me-Selvportret. ca, 1935-38. Object Number: WHJ-BP-SP-00018.  12 x 4 ½ cm. Trial impression (test print) from the original woodblock. Øbro Kunsthandel. Copenhagen. 2026.

## Willie and Holcha (double portrait). Ca 1932-1939.

Seven known impressions.

In Willie and Holcha, Johnson presents a head-and-shoulders portrait of himself and his wife, Holcha Krake, likely based on a watercolor executed around 1932. Holcha, wearing a headscarf, faces the viewer with a calm and composed presence, while Johnson, shown in profile, turns toward her in a gesture suggesting tenderness, closeness, and quiet protection.

Art historian Richard J. Powell has proposed that Johnson intentionally reimagined Holcha as a Black woman. Through this visual strategy, Johnson appears to collapse conventional racial boundaries, emphasizing shared emotional and spiritual connection over difference. The unified skin tones in the woodcut do not negate identity; rather, they suggest a transcendence of racial distinction, framing their relationship as one grounded in mutual respect, affection, and creative partnership (Powell, "Johnson: Expressionist and Artist of the Blues Aesthetic," 1988).

Of the seven known impressions, all are catalogued under the title Willie and Holcha, with the exception of the example in the Greenville County Museum of Art, which is recorded under the alternate title Little Talk. Although the print is believed to have been created around 1932–33, the earliest documented reference dates to February 1939, when a hand-colored impression of Willie and Holcha, exhibited under the title Man and Woman, appeared in Johnson and Krake's joint exhibition at The Artists Gallery in New York.

William H. Johnson. Study for Willie and Holcha, ca. 1932. Watercolor on paper. Smithsonian American Art Museum, 1967.59.89R-V

Willie and Holcha. Ca. 1932- 1939. Object Number: WHJ-BP-SP-00019. Block print on paper. (Woodcut) Hand colored with palette of ochre, tan, pink, and pale yellow against a cool blue background. Inscribed on backing board: “Willie and Holcha/William H. Johnson. Size: 14 1⁄8 x 17 1⁄4 in. (35.8 x 43.8 cm). Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Smithsonian American Art Museum, 1967.59.793. Exhibited: Memorial Hall, Nebraska State Teachers College, March 1-15, 1957. Illustrated on page 190 of William H. Johnson, 1901–1970, by Adelyn D. Breeskin and Jan K. Muhlert (Smithsonian Institution Press, 1971)

Willie and Holcha (Little Talk) Ca. 1932- 1939. Object Number: WHJ-BP-SP-00020. Block print on paper. (Woodcut). Hand colored with palette of bold blues and browns with green accents and a yellow headwrap. Size: 15 ¼ × 18½ inches. Provenance: Greenville County Museum of Art. USA. Museum purchase from the Arthur and Holly Magill Fund.

Willie and Holcha. Ca. 1932- 1939. Object Number: WHJ-BP-SP-00021. Block print on paper. (Woodcut). Size: 13.25 x 16 in. (33.66 x 40.64 cm). Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Courtesy of the Amistad Research Center, New Orleans, LA. Accession Number: ARC.HAR.WHJO.1934.14.

Willie and Holcha. Ca. 1932- 1939. Object Number: WHJ-BP-SP-00022. Block print on paper. (Woodcut). Signed in pencil on recto and verso. "Til Holcha fra Willie" To Holcha from Willie. Annotated Dal-533-(2). Provenance: Harmon Foundation, Inc. records. Library of Congress. Item 200368814.

Willie and Holcha. Ca. 1932- 1939. Object Number: WHJ-BP-SP-00023. Block print on paper. (Woodcut) Annotated Dal-366B-5. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Smithsonian American Art Museum. Celebrating 175: Artist File, Johnson, William H., circa 1969-1971. Page 33

Willie and Holcha. Ca. 1932- 1939. Object Number: WHJ-BP-SP-00024. Block print on paper. (Woodcut) Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Smithsonian American Art Museum. Celebrating 175: Artist File, Johnson, William H., circa 1969-1971. Page 27.

Willie and Holcha. Ca. 1932- 1939. Object Number: WHJ-BP-SP-00025. Block print on paper. (Woodcut) Size: H: 22 1/8 in. W: 23 7/8 in. D: 1 ¾ in. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Hampton University Museum & Archives. Object ID: 67.44.14

Holcha Krake and William H. Johnson, Kerteminde, ca. 1932. Courtesy of Helga and Niels Ejsing; reproduced from Richard J. Powell, Homecoming: The Art and Life of William H. Johnson.

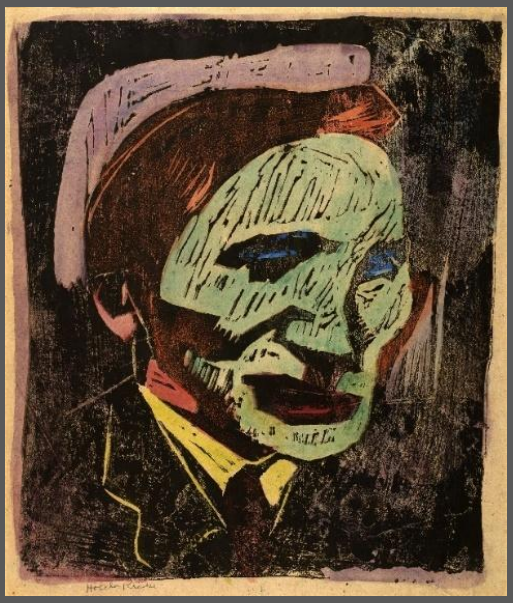
## Holcha Krake. Ca, 1932-1935.

Five known impressions.

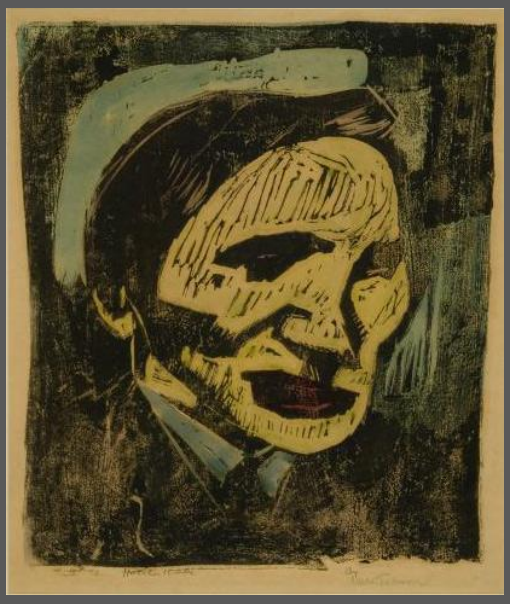
In Holcha Krake, Johnson presents a stylized three-quarter portrait of his Danish wife, the textile artist Holcha Krake. Also known as Lil Holcha, the print depicts her wearing a hat with a sweeping brim, while the suggestion of a jacket and collar anchors the figure within a loosely defined background. The exaggerated features and sharply incised lines lend the portrait a psychological intensity characteristic of Johnson's engagement with Expressionist aesthetics.

Johnson met Krake at a Scandinavian art colony in Cagnes-sur-Mer in 1929. After only a few months, the couple became engaged and married the following year in Kerteminde, Denmark. Their relationship formed a rare and resilient artistic partnership that crossed cultural and national boundaries. Throughout the 1930s and early 1940s, they lived and worked together in Denmark, Tunisia, Norway, and the United States, sharing a life deeply centered on artistic production and mutual support. Krake's death from cancer in 1944 profoundly affected Johnson and marked a decisive turning point in his life and work.

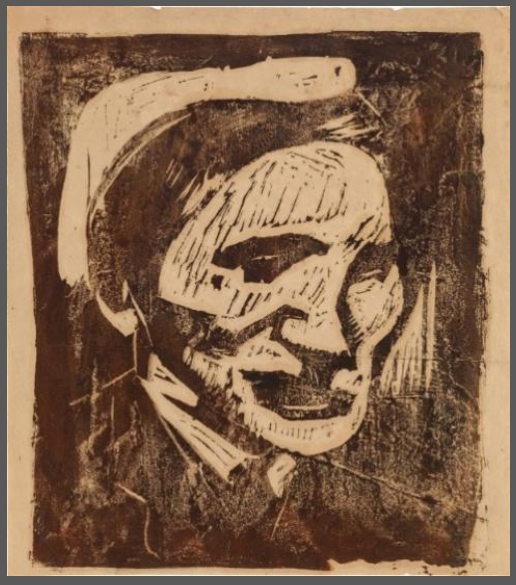
Although Johnson and Krake lived closely together and were rarely separated for nearly fifteen years, relatively few known portraits of her by Johnson exist in any medium. This may suggest that she did not prefer to pose as a traditional portrait model.



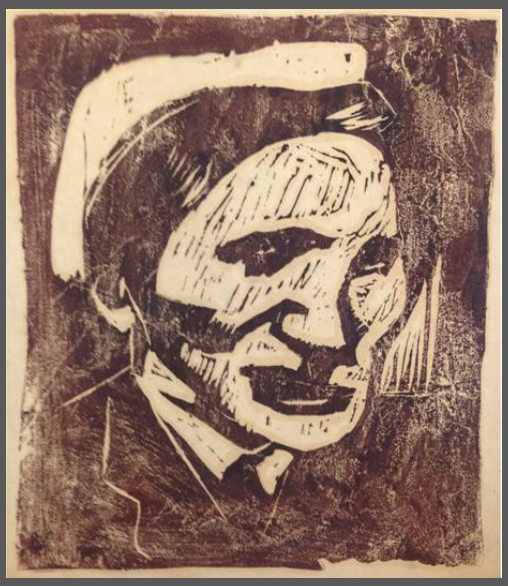
Holcha Krake. Ca. 1932-1935. Object Number: WHJ-BP-HOL-001. Block print on paper. ( Woodcut). Hand-colored with a palette of mint green, pale blue, and deep blue for the face and eyes, reddish-brown for the hair, lavender-white for the headscarf, and accented with yellow and crimson at the collar against a dark, mottled background. Titled Holcha Krake at lower left. Size: 17 1⁄8 x 13 5⁄8 in. (43.4 x 34.5 cm) irregular. Provenance:  Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Smithsonian American Art Museum, 1967.59.794.



Holcha Krake. Ca. 1932-1935. Object Number: WHJ-BP-HOL-002. Block print on paper. ( Woodcut). Hand-colored with a palette of pale yellow and olive green for the face, light blue for the headscarf and collar, deep red for the lips, and set against a dark greenish-black background. Signed W.H. Johnson at lower right. Titled Holcha Krake at lower left. Size: 16 15/16 x 13 7/8 in. (43.0 x 35.3 cm). Provenance:  Spencer Museum of Art. Accession number: 1994.0039



Holcha Krake. Ca. 1932-1935. Object Number: WHJ-BP-HOL-003. Printed in brown on handmade buff paper. (Woodcut). Artist's proof. Size: 14 x12 in. (356 x 305 mm). Provenance: Estate of Holcha Krake; thence by descent to her grandniece, Johanna Voll. Sold at Swann Auction Galleries. Sale 2442 - Lot 15. Apr 06, 2017.



Holcha Krake. Ca. 1932-1935. Object Number: WHJ-BP-HOL-004. Printed on brown on paper. (Woodcut). Size H: 20 in, W: 16.75 in. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Courtesy of Oakland Museum of California (OMCA). Accession no: A67.62.19.

Holcha Krake. Ca. 1932-1935. Object Number: WHJ-BP-HOL-005. Printed on brown on paper. (Woodcut). Size: H: 20 ¾ in. W: 16 ¾ in.  D: 1 ¼ in. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Hampton University Museum & Archives. Accession no: 67.44.11

*Holcha Krake, 1937. Photograph by Johan Magnus Nerbøvik.*

# 4. Tunisia, North Africa.

## The Mosque of the Sabres. Ca. 1932-1935.

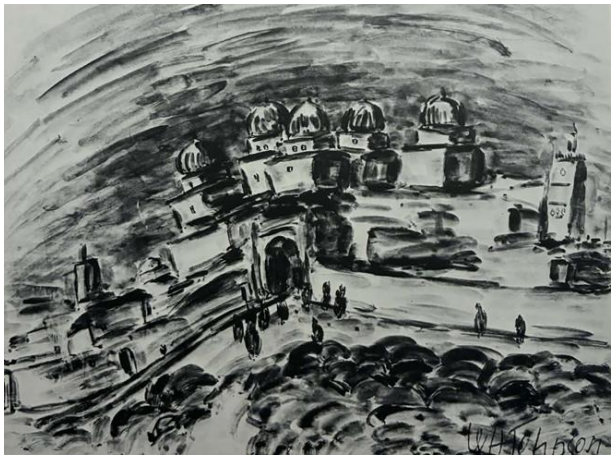
Six known impressions.

In the spring of 1932, Johnson and Krake, undertook a three-month journey through Tunisia, immersing themselves in the region's rich cultural and artistic traditions. During their travels, the couple produced numerous quick studies in watercolor and pencil, with Johnson focusing particularly on architectural subjects and urban scenes.

One of the structures he recorded during this trip later served as the basis for a block print and has been identified as the Mosque of the Sabres (Zaouia of Sidi Amor Abbada), a nineteenth-century religious complex and mausoleum dedicated to a revered blacksmith saint. Spanning more than 1,500 square meters, the structure is distinguished by its ribbed domes supported on squinches, features that give the building a striking and easily recognizable silhouette.

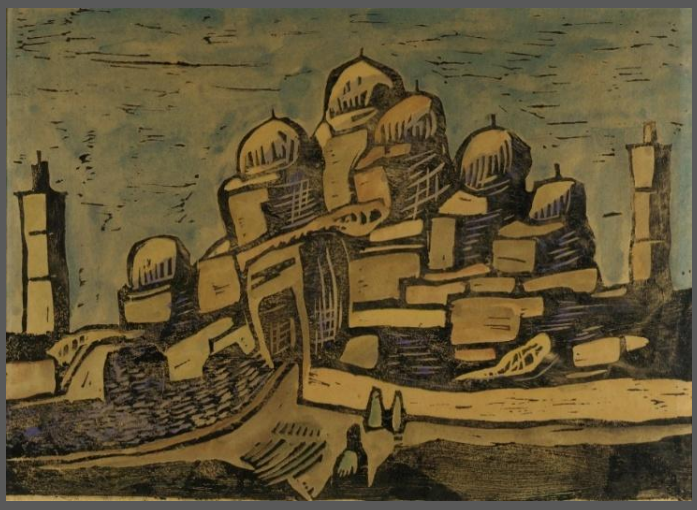
Johnson's print, together with a companion watercolor of the Mosque of the Sabres, presents the site as an idealized hilltop city. Through bold lines and simplified, sculptural forms, he emphasizes the building's sacred geometry and monumental presence, transforming the architecture into a powerful and contemplative composition.

Mosque of the Sabres exists in two known variations and was likely created between 1932 and 1935, possibly first intended for Johnson and Krake's joint exhibition at the Kerteminde Library in October 1932, organized shortly after their return from Tunisia. The print is known under several titles, including Landscape with Mosques, Mosques on a Hill, and Tunisian Land. Mosque.



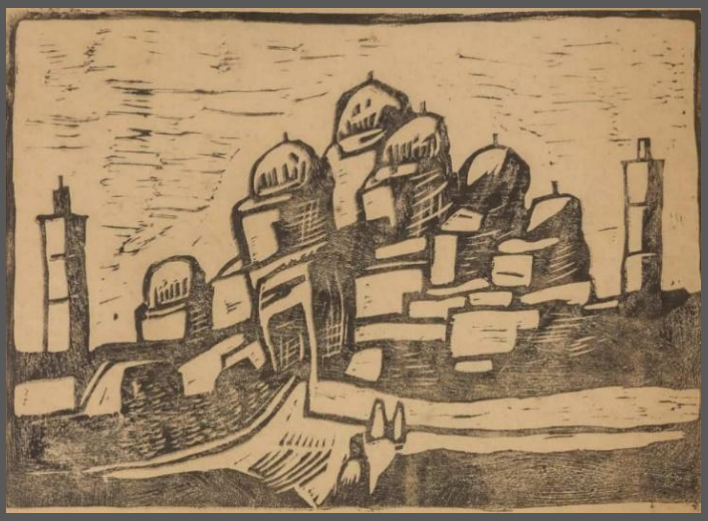
William H. Johnson, Landscape, North Africa, 1932. Watercolor on paper. Collection: George Washington Carver Museum, Tuskegee Institute, Alabama.

The Mosque of the Sabres. Ca,1932-1935. Object Number: WHJ-BP-TUN-001. Hand-colored woodcut on paper. Signed W.H. Johnson. Size: 21 3⁄4 x 21 7⁄8 in. (55.2 x 55.6 cm). Provenance:  Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Smithsonian American Art Museum, 1967.59.857. Exhibited: New York Public Library, Countee Cullen Branch, December 5, 1956-March 1, 1957.



The Mosque of the Sabres. Ca,1932-1935. Object Number: WHJ-BP-TUN-002.  Block print on paper. (Woodcut). Hand-colored in soft sandy ochres and warm browns, set against a muted blue sky with touches of deep purple and black for architectural depth. Size: 14 5⁄8 x 19 1⁄2 in. (37.0 x 49.5 cm) irregular. Provenance:  Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Smithsonian American Art Museum, 1967.59.855.

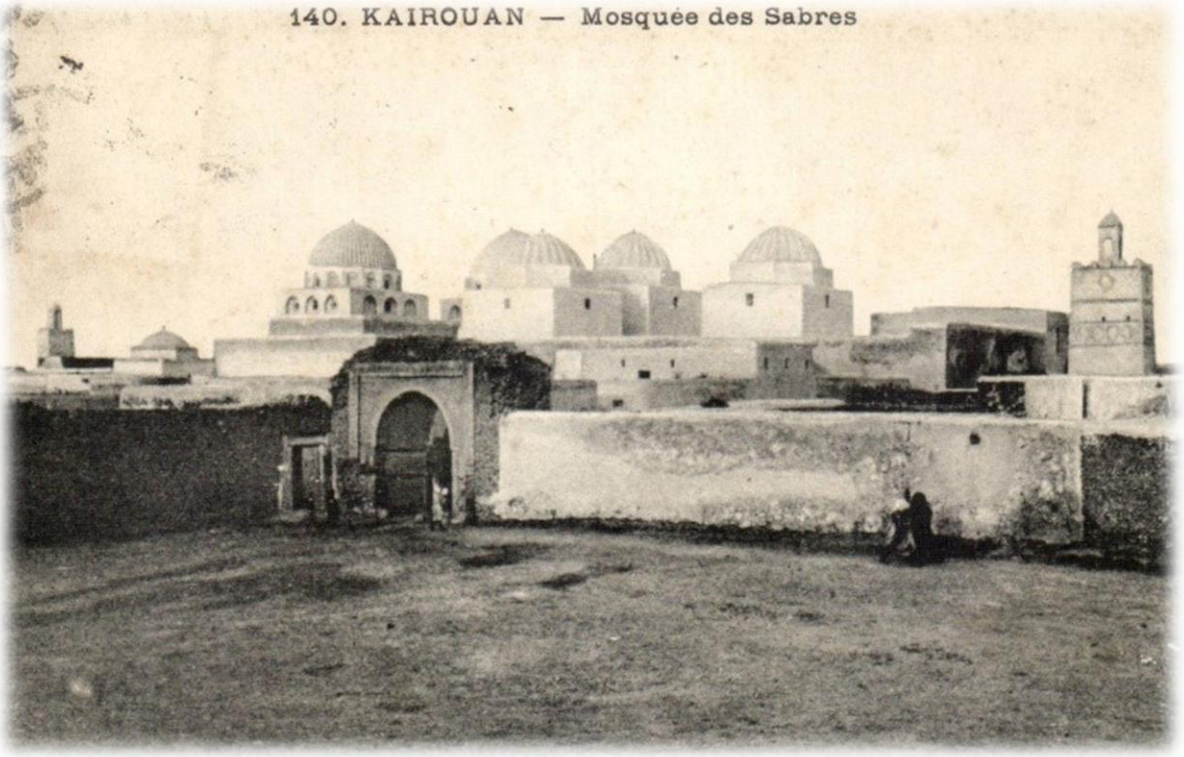
The Mosque of the Sabres. Ca,1932-1935. Object Number: WHJ-BP-TUN-003. Block print on paper. (Woodcut). Hand-colored in warm ochre and dusty rose, with bold black outlines on a cream background. Titled lower left: Tunisian land. Mosq. Size: H: 12 in, W: 17 in. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Courtesy of Oakland Museum of California (OMCA). Accession no: A67.62.22



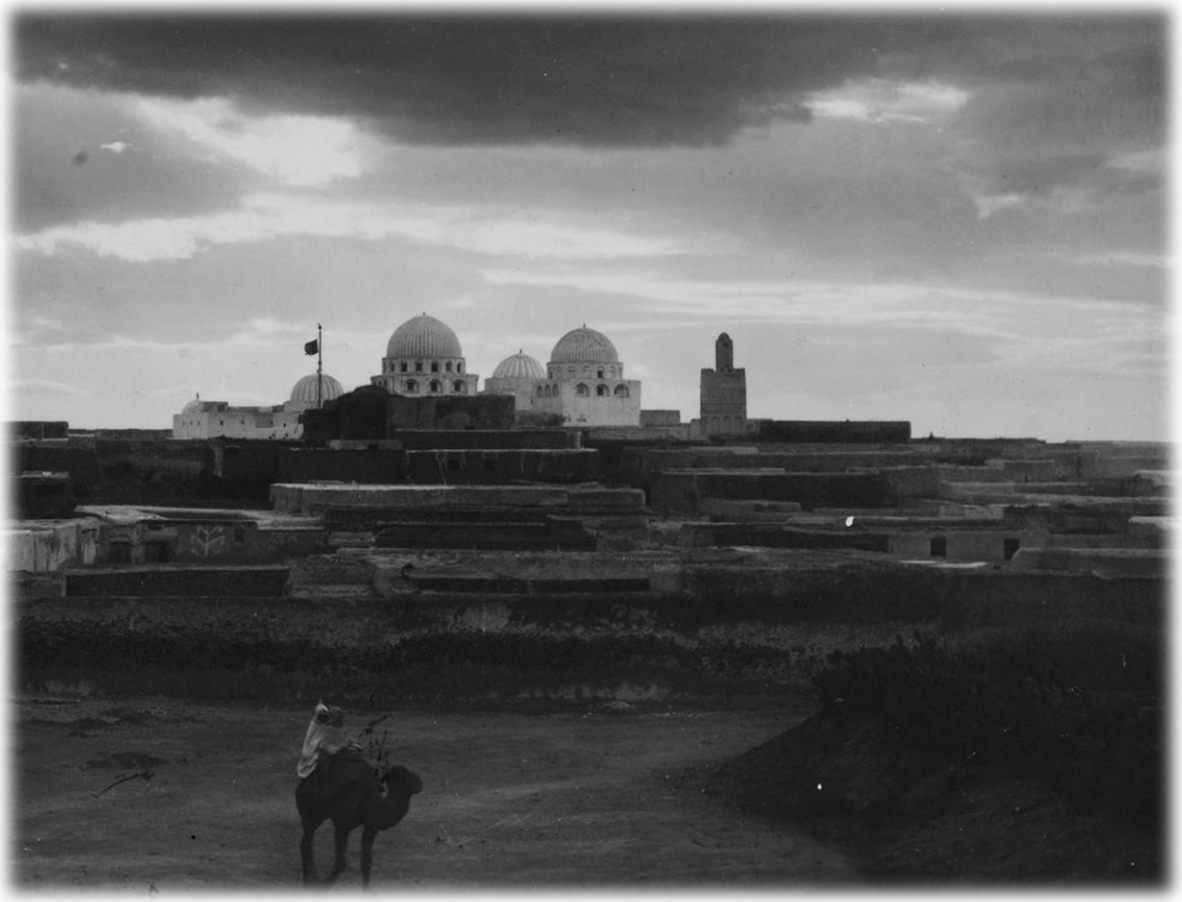
The Mosque of the Sabres. Ca,1932-1935. Object Number: WHJ-BP-TUN-004. Block print on paper. (Woodcut). Size: 12 3/8 x 17 7/8 in. Provenance: Fisk University Galleries, Fisk University, Nashville, TN. Courtesy of American Federation of Arts.

The Mosque of the Sabres. Ca,1932-1935. Object Number: Block print on paper. (Woodcut). Inscribed a on verso: No. TU-349-A. Provenance: From Harmon Foundation. Library of Congress, item 91482331.

The Mosque of the Sabres. Ca,1932-1935. Object Number: WHJ-BP-TUN-006. Block print on paper. (Woodcut). Hand-colored in soft blue, muted browns, pale yellow, dark brown, and red-yellow accents. Size: H: 23 7/16 in. W: 27 ½ in D: 1 13/16 in. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Hampton University Museum & Archives. Accession no: 67.44.36




*The Mosque of the Sabres. Kairouan. French postcard. Ca 1900. Private photo.*



*Toward the Mosque of the Sabres. Anonymous photograph, 1923.*

# 5. Refugee Series.

William H. Johnson's Refugee print series bears witness to the human toll of war in 1930s Europe, with a particular focus on the fragility and displacement of children. While the figures were initially thought, according to the exhibition catalogue for William H. Johnson: World on Paper (Amon Carter Museum, 2007), to depict victims of the Spanish Civil War, it is now understood that some are based on Norwegian children known to the artist. Johnson reworked these individual likenesses into more universal images of childhood displacement, evoking the broader humanitarian crises that shaped Europe during the decade

Beginning in 1933, the rise of the Nazi regime in Germany triggered a growing exodus of intellectuals, artists, and their families fleeing systematic persecution to neighboring European countries. The Nuremberg Laws, enacted in 1935, stripped German Jews of citizenship and accelerated this mass displacement into the hundreds of thousands. After 1936, the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War and the consolidation of Franco's regime further intensified displacement across Europe.

Johnson began his Refugee series during his time in Scandinavia around 1935–36, likely shaped by the growing political unrest in Europe, which personally affected his brother-in-law, the German sculptor Christoph Voll, as well as by possible encounters with refugees seeking asylum in Denmark and Norway.

As political tensions escalated and Nazi persecution increasingly targeted artists and interracial couples, Johnson and his Danish wife, Holcha Krake, were themselves drawn into a condition of displacement, leaving Europe for New York in 1938. There, Johnson continued to develop the series, particularly during his affiliation with the Harlem Community Art Center in 1939, where the themes of exile, uncertainty, and forced migration assumed an even more personal and emotionally charged significance.

Johnson's Refugee Series consists of three individual works.

Refugee Mother and Child, ca. 1936-1939

Refugee Child, ca. 1936-1939

Refugee Boy, ca. 1936-1939

Photograph of Jewish refugee children arriving in Bergen, Norway, October 1939. Courtesy of Bergens Tidende.

## Refugee Mother and Child, ca. 1936-1939

One known impression.

In Refugee Mother and Child, Johnson presents the figures in a tightly compressed, frontal composition that underscores their physical and emotional closeness. The child's head rests between the mother's hand and breast, drawn close to her face in a gesture of protection and intimacy. The contrast between the child's yellow-toned skin and steady gaze and the mother's warmer pink hues creates a distinct visual separation while reinforcing their interdependence.

As in Johnson's print Jon Fisherman (2) (Object No. WHJ-BP-FSH-0008–0011), the use of strong color contrasts and simplified forms creates a stained-glass-like effect. Flattened planes and emphatic outlines heighten the image's symbolic resonance, transforming the intimate scene into an iconic representation of endurance and maternal devotion.

Refugee Mother and Child, ca. 1936-1939. Object Number: WHJ-BP-REF-001. Block print on paper. (Woodcut). Hand-colored with a palette of ochre, muted red, black, and pale blue, with ochre dominating the faces and red accenting the lips. Signed W.H. Johnson to lower right. Size:  10 x 10 1⁄2 in. (25.4 x 26.7 cm). Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Smithsonian American Art Museum, 1967.59.970

## Refugee Child, ca. 1936-1939.

Nine known impressions.

In Refugee Child, Johnson presents a stylized portrait of a young child, employing bold, simplified carving to emphasize the figure's emotional presence. The child's large, wide-set eyes and tightly closed mouth convey a mix of vulnerability and resilience.

The print was derived from Johnson's painting Girl in a Red Dress (ca. 1936), executed during his years in Volda, Norway. The sitter has been identified as Liv Barstad, a young girl from Volda who's large, questioning eyes captivated the artist. In an interview with the local newspaper Møre (Volda, 9 July 1936), Johnson recalled: "I was not planning to paint any portraits, but this little girl was so attractive that I knew I had no other choice."

While the portrait originated in a quiet rural Norwegian setting, Johnson's decision to reuse the motif in the print Refugee Child suggests that he came to regard her image as a universal symbol of the displacement and uncertainty experienced by children across Europe in the late 1930s.

Liv Barstad (1927–2012), who lived near Johnson at Engeset in Volda, modeled for Girl in a Red Dress at around eight or nine years of age. She reportedly took great pride in knowing that her portrait belonged to the collection of the Moderna Museet in Stockholm.

Girl in a Red Dress ca. 1936. Oil on canvas. Moderna Museet, Stockholm (NM 3290).

Refugee Child ca. 1936–1939. Watercolor on paper. Possible preparatory sketch. Smithsonian American Art Museum, 1967.59.19.

Refugee Child, ca. 1936-1939. Object Number: WHJ-BP-REF-002.Block print on paper. (Woodcut). Signed W.H. Johnson to lower right. Annotated: "NOR-319A-1. Hand-colored with a palette of black, ochre, reddish-brown, and soft yellow-green. Size: 21 5⁄8 x 14 1⁄2 in. (55.0 x 36.8 cm) irregular. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Smithsonian American Art Museum, 1967.59.903.

Refugee Child, ca. 1936-1939. Object Number: WHJ-BP-REF-003.Block print on paper. (Woodcut). Signed W.H. Johnson on verso. Annotated: "NOR-329A-2. Hand-colored with a palette of deep purple-black for the hair, light pinkish tones for the face, and reddish-brown for the garment. The background is rendered with yellow, overlaid with vertical black lines. Provenance: Harmon Foundation. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, www.loc.gov/item/2003688152.

Refugee Child, ca. 1936-1939. Object Number: WHJ-BP-REF-004.Block print on paper. (Woodcut). Hand-colored in a palette of earthy brown tones for the hair and clothing, deep green for the eyes, and light beige for the face and background. Size: 16 7/8 x 13 3/8 in. (42.9 x 34.0 cm). Provenance: Gift of Mrs. Douglas E. Younger.  (Assistant Director at the Harmon Foundation). Smithsonian American Art Museum. Accession no: 1971.142.

Refugee Child, ca. 1936-1939. Object Number: WHJ-BP-REF-005.Block print on paper. (Woodcut). Size: 15 x 12 in. (38.1 x 30.48 cm) Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Courtesy of the Amistad Research Center, New Orleans, LA. Accession Number:ARC.HAR.WHJO.1939.18

Refugee Child, ca. 1936-1939. Object Number: WHJ-BP-REF-006. Block print on paper. (Woodcut). Size: 15 3/8 x 12 1/4 in. irr. (39.0525 x 31.115 cm. Provenance: Gift of the Philadelphia Commercial Museum (also known as the Philadelphia Civic Center Museum), Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Accession Number: 2004.13.6

Refugee Child, ca. 1936-1939. Object Number: WHJ-BP-REF-007.Block print on paper. (Woodcut). Annotated: "NOR-524.B-2.” Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Courtesy of Oakland Museum of California (OMCA). Accession no: A67.62.20

Refugee Child, ca. 1936-1939. Object Number: WHJ-BP-REF-008.Block print on paper. (Woodcut). Annotated NOR-329A-2. Provenance:  Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Smithsonian American Art Museum. Celebrating 175: Artist File, Johnson, William H., circa 1969-1971. Page 32.

Refugee Child, ca. 1936-1939. Object Number: WHJ-BP-REF-009.Block print on paper. (Woodcut). Provenance:  Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Smithsonian American Art Museum. Celebrating 175: Artist File, Johnson, William H., circa 1969-1971. Page 28.

Refugee Child, ca. 1936-1939. Object Number: WHJ-BP-REF-0010. Block print on paper. (Woodcut). Size: H: 25 5/8 in. W: 21 5/16 in. D: 1 ¾ in. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Hampton University Museum & Archives. Accession no: 67.44.30.

William H. Johnson seen with Girl in a Red Dress at the Trondheim Art Society (Trondhjems Kunstforening). Norway, September 1937. Image credit: William H. Johnson Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

William H. Johnson seen holding a version of the Refugee Child print at Harlem Community Art Center in New York. Ca, 1939-1942. Image credit: Christoph Voll estate collection. Per Mossin. Danmarks Radio 1983.

## Refugee Boy, ca. 1936-1939.

Five known impressions.

In Refugee Boy, Johnson presents a frontal, tightly framed portrait of a young boy, rendered with striking immediacy through bold, simplified forms. The face dominates the composition, enlarged and mask-like, with wide, dark eyes and a slightly open mouth that suggests both vulnerability and unease.

The print closely echoes Johnson's watercolor Portrait of a Little Boy (ca. 1932–1935), a work he gifted to his wife, Holcha Krake. The boy's identity remains unknown, though he was likely one of the children who gathered around Johnson as he worked, captivated by the unusual sight of the artist and his animated presence.

One possible candidate is Rolf Klepp (1927–2015), a boy from Volda whom Johnson met in autumn 1935. According to Narve F. Birkeland (2001), Johnson encountered Klepp in tears after he was unable to afford a boat fare for a school trip and invited him to sit for a portrait.

This encounter parallels Refugee Child (ca. 1936–1939), in which Johnson portrayed Liv Barstad, a girl from the same quiet Norwegian town of Volda, whose sorrowful eyes inspired him to use her image as a symbol of the displacement faced by children in prewar Europe.

William H. Johnson, Portrait of a Little Boy, ca. 1932-1935. Watercolor. Smithsonian American Art Museum, 1967.59.15R-V

Refugee Boy, ca. 1936-1939. Object NumberWHJ-BP-REF-0011. Block print on paper mounted on paperboard. (Woodcut). Hand-colored in ochre, teal, and deep brown, with red accents and a blue garment against a pale background. Size: 13 1⁄2 x 10 3⁄4 in. (34.3 x 27.3 cm). Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Smithsonian American Art Museum, 1967.59.902

Refugee Boy ca. 1936-1939. Object Number: WHJ-BP-REF-0012. Block print on paper (Woodcut). Size: 15 3/16 × 12 5/8 in. (38.6 × 32 cm). Provenance: Evans-Tibbs Gallery, Washington, D.C. until 1992. Sold on January 21, 1992 to Reba and Dave Williams, New York. Gifted to The Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1999. Object Number: 1999.529.77.

Refugee Boy ca. 1936-1939. Object Number: WHJ-BP-REF-0013. Block print on paper (Woodcut). Size: H: 23 ¼ in. W: 21 5/8 in. D: 1 ¾ in. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Hampton University Museum & Archives. Object ID: 67.44.5

Refugee Boy ca. 1936-1939. Object Number: WHJ-BP-REF-0014. Block print on paper (Woodcut). Size: 14 ½ in. W: 12 in. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Hampton University Museum & Archives. Object ID: 67.44.6

Refugee Boy ca. 1936-1939. Object Number: WHJ-BP-REF-0015. Block print on paper (Woodcut). Size: 21"h x 17"w x 1"d. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Fisk University Galleries. Object ID. #00414

## Outdoor Girl-Head. ca. 1935–1938.

Four known impressions.

In Outdoor Girl–Head, Johnson portrays a young girl set against what appears to be a rural or outdoor setting, a suggestion reinforced by the title. Dominated by a close-up view of the girl's face, the composition is constructed through thick black contours, sharply carved highlights, and flattened planes that create a bold, almost stained-glass-like effect. Heavy shadowing along the left side of the face and the simplified treatment of the features lend the image a strong psychological presence while emphasizing the expressive force of the woodcut medium.

The title's reference to the "outdoor girl" may evoke contemporary interwar ideals associated with youth, health, vitality, and outdoor life, themes that held particular cultural resonance within Scandinavian society during the 1930s.

The designation Head suggests that the composition may have been conceived as part of a larger series or related figure study, although no corresponding full-length version is currently known.

Outdoor Girl-Head, ca. 1935-1938. Object Number: WHJ-BP-OUT-0001. Block print on paper mounted on paperboard. (Woodcut) Signed W.H. Johnson to the lower right. Hand-colored with a palette of yellow-green, red, pale peach, deep green, and black, set against a background of light blue and muted green tones. Size: 12 3⁄4 x 13 1⁄4 in. (32.4 x 33.5 cm). Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation, Smithsonian American Art Museum, 1967.59.969

Outdoor Girl-Head, ca. 1935-1938. Object Number: WHJ-BP-OUT-0002. Block print on cream paper. (Woodcut). Size: 10 x 10 ½ inches. Provenance: The estate of Holcha Krake; by descent to her grandniece, Johanna Voll. Private collection.

Outdoor Girl-Head, ca. 1935-1938. Object Number: WHJ-BP-OUT-0003.Block print on paper. (Woodcut) Hand colored.  Signed W.H. Johnson on recto and verso. Annotated: "til Holcha fra Willie"; "NOR-597-2." Provenance: From Harmon Foundation, Inc. records. Courtesy of the Library of Congress, LC-USZC4-11579.

Outdoor Girl-Head, ca. 1935-1938. Object Number: WHJ-BP-OUT-0004.Block print on paper. (Woodcut) Size: 15"h x 16"w x 1⅛"d. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Fisk University Galleries. Object ID. #0407

# 6. Scandinavian Landmarks and Landscapes

During the 1930s, William H. Johnson traveled extensively throughout Denmark and Norway, depicting Scandinavian landscapes, villages, churches, and rural architecture that would become central subjects within his woodcut practice.

Often journeying by bicycle with camping gear and art supplies, he worked on lightweight and inexpensive paper, using watercolor, ink, and gouache to rapidly capture architectural forms, shifting light, color relationships, and the overall atmosphere of a place directly from observation. These portable studies functioned not simply as finished works in themselves, but as preparatory visual records that Johnson later reinterpreted in the more demanding medium of oil and woodcut.

When Johnson translated his watercolor studies onto woodblocks, he traced their essential contours while simplifying and reorganizing details into bold lines, flattened forms, and strong tonal contrasts. The physical resistance of the woodblock encouraged further simplification and abstraction, transforming observed landscapes into expressive graphic compositions shaped as much by the act of carving as by representation itself.

Johnson's Scandinavian landmarks and landscapes series consists of ten individual works.

Windmill, Denmark. (The Swan Mill) ca. 1932-1935.

Windmill, Kerteminde (The Viby Mill, no. 1), ca. 1932–1935.

The Viby Mill, No. 2. ca. 1932–1935.

Bazaars Behind Church of Our Savior, Oslo. ca,1935-1937.

Lom Kirke. (Lom Church, square Format) ca. 1935–1938

Lom Gl. Kirke, Gudbrandsdalen (The Old Church in Gudbrandsdalen. Vertical Format). ca. 1935–1938.

Volda Fjord, Norway, ca. 1935–1938

Moon-Rise, Star-Rise, ca. 1935–1938.

Church by Lake II. ( Farmstead by Lake ) ca, 1935–1938.

Chalets by Jostedal Glacier (Grepstadstøylen) ca. 1935-1937.

William H. Johnson, Bazaars behind Church, Oslo, ca. 1935, watercolor. Smithsonian American Art Museum, 1967.59.11

## Windmill, Denmark. (The Swan Mill) ca. 1932-1935.

Three known impressions.

In Windmill, Denmark, Johnson presents a compressed view of a windmill rising above a cluster of simplified architectural forms. The structure is rendered through bold, angular carving, with the mill's sails cutting diagonally across the composition, introducing a sense of movement and tension. Rather than situating the mill and the miller's house within a naturalistic spatial setting, Johnson fuses them into a tightly unified arrangement: the house is anchored directly beneath the mill, its simplified geometry echoing and supporting the larger structure above.

The mill, now identified as Svanemøllen (the Swan Mill), stands as a prominent landmark at Møllebakken in Kerteminde. Built in 1853 and named for the swan-shaped weather vane atop its roof, it has long defined the town's northern skyline. The mill was owned by the Danish painter Johannes Larsen (1867–1961), who built his villa opposite it in 1902. This site became a vibrant center of artistic and cultural life on Funen, and the mill itself, frequently depicted in Danish art, remained in Larsen's possession until his death in 1961.

During his residence in Kerteminde between 1930 and 1935, Johnson lived only a short walk from Svanemøllen, which became a recurring motif in his work from this period.

Windmill, Denmark. (The Swan Mill). Ca. 1932-1935. Carved wooden printing block with inlaid chalk. 23 x 23 cm. Johannes Larsen Museum.

Old Windmill, ca. 1930–1935. Ink on paper. Possible preparatory sketch. Smithsonian American Art Museum, 1967.59.834

Svanemøllen at Møllebakken, Kerteminde. Marts 2025. Photo: Olav Sejerøe.

Windmill, Denmark. (The Swan Mill). Ca. 1932-1935. Object Number: WHJ-BP-SCA-001. Block print on paper. (Woodcut). Hand-colored with a palette of soft sky blue, pale yellow, black, and muted green, with touches of brown and blue accents. Size: 16 x 12 3⁄8 in. 40.5 x 31.4 cm. Gift of the Harmon Foundation Smithsonian American Art Museum, 1967.59.792.

Windmill, Denmark. (The Swan Mill). Ca. 1932-1935. Object Number: WHJ-BP-SCA-002. Block print on paper. (Woodcut). Signed W.H. Johnson at lower right. Hand-colored with a palette of deep black, burnt orange, ochre, and pale turquoise green, with warm brown accents. Size: 14.5 x 11 in. (36.83 x 27.94 cm). Provenance: Gift of the National Collection of Fine Arts (NCFA). Now the Smithsonian American Art Museum. Courtesy of the Amistad Research Center, New Orleans, LA. Accession Number ARC.WHJO.1939.20

Windmill, Denmark. (The Swan Mill). Ca. 1932-1935. Object Number: WHJ-BP-SCA-003. Block print on paper. (Woodcut). Size: 42 x 31 cm. Woodcut from the original block; posthumous impression printed by Hardy Ernst, Fyns Grafiske Værksted, Odense, 1998. Johannes Larsen Museet.

## Windmill, Kerteminde (The Viby Mill, no. 1), ca. 1932–1935.

Four known impressions.

In Windmill, Kerteminde, Johnson appears to depict what is believed to be Viby Mølle (The Viby Mill), located approximately six kilometers northeast of Kerteminde on the Hindsholm Peninsula. The identification remains tentative, but the site holds particular resonance as the area where Holcha Krake, Johnson's wife, spent part of her childhood, suggesting a possible personal and geographical connection to the motif.

The Viby Mølle was a popular local landmark and gathering place. From its elevated position, it offers wide views over Salby, Mesinge, Munkebo Bakke, and the Odense Fjord. Johnson may have used this vantage point when painting his many aerial landscapes of the Kerteminde area during this period.

Of the four known impressions, only two include titles. The impression in the collection of the Smithsonian Institution is inscribed Kerteminde, while the impression in the collection of the Johannes Larsen Museet is titled Mølle – Kerteminde (Windmill – Kerteminde).

Windmill and Cottage, Denmark, ca. 1930–1935. Ink on paper. Possible preparatory sketch. Smithsonian American Art Museum, 1967.59.834.

The Viby Mill at Hindsholm. 1939. Unknown photographer. Courtesy of Viby Sogneforening.

Windmill, Kerteminde (The Viby Mill, no. 1), ca. 1932–1935. Object Number: WHJ-BP-SCA-004. Block print on paper. (Woodcut). Hand-colored with a palette of dark brown, black, soft green, pale yellow, and muted red. Size: H: 16 in. W: 12 13/16 in. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Hampton University Museum & Archives. Object ID: 63.195

Windmill, Kerteminde (The Viby Mill, no. 1), ca. 1932–1935. Object Number: WHJ-BP-SCA-005. Block print on paper. (Woodcut). Signed W.H. Johnson. Size: H: 24 3/8 in. W: 20 3/16 in. D: 1 5/8 in. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Hampton University Museum & Archives. Object ID: 67.44.8

Windmill, Kerteminde (The Viby Mill, no. 1), ca. 1932–1935. Object Number: WHJ-BP-SCA-006. Block print on paper. (Woodcut). Hand-colored. Signed lower right: W. H. Johnson. Inscribed lower left: Kerteminde. Size: 16 x 13 (40.7 x 32.9). Provenance: Collection: Mr. and Mrs. David Harriton, Minisink Hills, Pennsylvania. Illustrated on page 186 of Johnson, 1901–1970, by Adelyn D. Breeskin and Jan K. Muhlert (Smithsonian Institution Press, 1971)

Windmill, Kerteminde (The Viby Mill, no. 1), ca. 1932–1935. Object Number: WHJ-BP-SCA-007. Block print on paper. (Woodcut). Signed W.H. Johnson. Titled, Mølle – Kerteminde. Size: 36,5 x 28 cm. Provenance: Private Danish Collection, hence Johannes Larsen Museum. Exhibited at: William H.Johnson og Holcha Krake. Et Kunstnerpar i 30ernes Kerteminde. Johannes Larsen Museum, 1 may-14 June, 1998. Photo: Ole Friis

## The Viby Mill, No. 2. ca. 1932–1935.

One known Impression. Posthumous printed in 1998.

In The Viby Mill, No. 2, Johnson transforms the windmill into a near-symbolic emblem, emphasizing design, structure, and rhythmic balance rather than topographical specificity.

In contrast to The Viby Mill, No. 1, this work demonstrates a more reductive and experimental technique. Broad gouges and stark passages of black and white create a powerful interplay of positive and negative space. The pronounced angularity and simplified forms reveal Johnson's exploration of the woodcut as an autonomous modernist medium, underscoring his engagement with the expressive potential of abstraction.

No original impressions of The Viby Mill, No. 2 are known today, suggesting that the block was either never printed or that any early impressions have been lost or remain undiscovered. The only known impressions are posthumous editions printed from the original block in an edition of ten by Ernst & Fomsgaard in 1998, of which only one impression is presently known today.

William H. Johnson. The Viby Mill, No. 2. Ca. 1932-1935. Size: 34 × 24 cm. Carved wooden printing block with inlaid chalk. Johannes Larsen Museum.

The Viby Mill, No. 2. ca. 1932–1935. Object Number:  WHJ-BP-SCA-008. Block print on paper. (Woodcut).  Size: 34 × 24 cm. Printed from the original block in an edition of ten by Hardy Ernst & Jes Fomsgaard. Fyns Grafiske Værksted, Odense. 1998. Exhibited at: William H.Johnson og Holcha Krake. Et Kunstnerpar i 30ernes Kerteminde. Johannes Larsen Museum, 1 may-14 June, 1998.

## Bazaars Behind Church of Our Savior, Oslo. Ca,1935-1937.

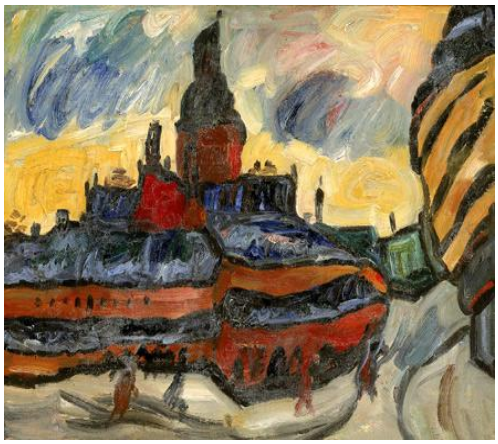
Nine known impressions.

Created after the painting Bazaars Behind Church, Oslo (ca. 1935), this print transforms the arcaded market complex beside Oslo Cathedral into a dynamic and highly stylized urban composition. Originally constructed between 1841 and 1858 and used as butcher shops, the bazaars curve around three sides of the cathedral block.

In Johnson's interpretation, the architecture is simplified into bold carved lines and flat planes of color that emphasize rhythm, movement, and spatial energy over precise architectural detail. The church tower rises prominently at the center, while the sweeping curve of the bazaars animates the foreground in a strong, almost theatrical progression of forms. Through exaggerated perspective and expressive simplification, Johnson reimagines the familiar Oslo landmark as a monumentally charged modern cityscape.

The earliest known record of the print dates to 16 July 1935, when Johnson and Holcha Krake presented an impression as a wedding gift to Reverend Lars Tjensvoll and Kjellaug Kårstad. Since Johnson arrived in Oslo in late January 1935, the first impression was likely produced between February and July of that year.

A later reference appears in September 1937, when Johnson presented another impression to the Trondheim Art Museum during his solo exhibition at the Trondheim Art Society (Trondhjems Kunstforening).



William H. Johnson. Bazaars behind Church, Oslo, ca. 1935, oil on burlap. Smithsonian American Art Museum, 1967.59.867.

The Oslo Bazaars. Norway. 2025. Foto credit. KF-arkiv.

Bazaars Behind Church of Our Savior, Oslo. Ca,1935-1937. Object Number:  WHJ-BP-SCA-009. Block print on paper. (Woodcut). Hand-colored in shades of blue, black, green, and yellow. Size: 3/4 x 15 1/4 in. (37.5 x 38.7 cm.). Provenance: The Harmon Foundation, New York. Acquired from the above Mr. and Mrs. Douglas Younger, New York. (Assistant Director at the Harmon Foundation). Sold at The Potomack Company. Alexandria, VA, US. February 12, 2025. Lot 2032

Bazaars Behind Church of Our Savior, Oslo. Ca,1935-1937. Object Number:  WHJ-BP-SCA-00010. Block print on paper. (Woodcut). Hand-colored in tones of yellow, pink, blue, green, and black. Signed W.H. Johnson. Size: 14 1/2" x 15 ¾ inches. 36 x 39 cm. Provenance: Private Collection, New Jersey. Sold at Rago. Lambertville NJ, United States. 13 Sep 2008. Lot no: 94.

Bazaars Behind Church of Our Savior, Oslo. Ca,1935-1937. Object Number:  WHJ-BP-SCA-00011. Block print on paper. (Woodcut). Hand-colored with a palette of ochre yellow, teal blue, earthy pink, muted green, and black. Remnant of original backing board inscribed with title and signed by William H. Johnson. Size: 13-1/2 x 14-1/2 inches. Provenance: The Collection of Dr. Dianne Whitfield-Locke and Dr. Carnell Locke, Maryland. Exhibited: Building on Tradition, The Collection of Dr. Dianne Whitfield-Locke and Dr. Carnell Locke, Hampton University Museum, October 12, 2013-December 7, 2013. Sold at Black Art Auction. Saint Louis, MO, US. May 16, 2020. Lot no: 97.

Bazaars Behind Church of Our Savior, Oslo. Ca,1935-1937. Object Number:  WHJ-BP-SCA-00012. Block print on paper. (Woodcut). Hand-colored with a palette of golden yellow, deep blue, cream, black, and touches of green. Signed W.H. Johnson in pencil on verso. Annotated: "Church of Our Savior, bazaars at rear"; "NOR-160 (5). Provenance: From Harmon Foundation. Library of Congress. Item 2003688143.

Bazaars Behind Church of Our Savior, Oslo. Ca,1935-1937. Object Number:  WHJ-BP-SCA-00013. Block print on paper. (Woodcut). Hand-colored with a palette of golden yellow, dusty rose, deep black, and muted beige. Signed at lower right: W. H. Johnson; inscribed at lower left: Til Brudeparret fra W.H. og "L. Søren" Johnson. ( To the wedding couple from W.H and Little Søren) Size: 16 3½ x 18 inches. Provenance: Kjellaug and Reverend Lars Tjensvoll, c.1935, and by descent in their family until 1997. Illustrated and catalogued as no. 34 in William H. Johnson: Truth Be Told by Steve Turner and Victoria Dailey (1996)

Bazaars Behind Church of Our Savior, Oslo. Ca,1935-1937. Object Number:  WHJ-BP-SCA-00014. Block print on paper. (Woodcut). Signed W.H. Johnson. Hand-colored with a palette of yellow, black, red, blue, green, and brown. Size: W. 38, 6 cm. H. 35 cm. Provenance: Gifted by Johnson to the Trondheim Art Museum during his visit to Trondheim for his exhibition at the Trondhjems Kunstforening in September 1937. From the collection of Trondheim art museum. Accession number: TKM-495-1937

Bazaars Behind Church of Our Savior, Oslo. Ca,1935-1937. Object Number:  WHJ-BP-SCA-00015. Block print on paper. (Woodcut).Hand-colored with a palette of deep red, black, and dark green set against a vibrant orange background. Size: 19 5/8 x 20 1/4 inches. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Collection of Morgan State University. Illustrated on page 72 in William H. Johnson: Revisiting an African American Modernist. Kenneth G. Rodger. North Carolina Central University Art Museum in Durham, North Carolina (2006).

Bazaars Behind Church of Our Savior, Oslo. Ca,1935-1937. Object Number:  WHJ-BP-SCA-00016. Block print on heavy, fibrous handmade buff paper. (Woodcut). Artist's proof. Size:  11 ½ x 12 ½ in. 37.5 x 37.5 cm (292 x 318 mm) Provenance: the estate of Holcha Krake; by descent to her grandniece, Johanna Voll. Christoph Voll Estate collection.

Bazaars Behind Church of Our Savior, Oslo. Ca,1935-1937. Object Number:  WHJ-BP-SCA-00017. Block print on paper. (Woodcut).Hand-colored. Size: 21"h x 21⅞"w x 1"d. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Fisk University Galleries. Object ID. #0430

## Lom Stave Church

During the autumn of 1935, while traveling through Gudbrandsdalen, William H. Johnson encountered the stave church at Lom, an experience that proved both visually and artistically formative.

Lom Stave Church (Lom stavkyrkje), originally constructed around 1158–1170, is one of Norway's largest and most significant surviving examples of medieval wooden architecture. Located in the mountain village of Fossbergom in the Gudbrandsdal valley, it remains an active parish church today. Its striking form is defined by vertical timber construction, tiered rooflines, and intricate carvings that merge Christian iconography with motifs derived from Viking-age ornament. The church also houses a notable collection of 18th-century paintings by Eggert Munch, a distant relative of Edvard Munch.

In his block print series depicting the church, Johnson translated its pronounced verticality and complex architectural structure into his own visual language, characterized by bold carving, simplified forms, and emphatic line.

He explored the subject in two known variations: a square-format version titled Lom Kirke (Lom Church), of which seven impressions are known, and a vertical-format version titled Lom Gl. Kirke, Gudbrandsdalen (Lom Old Church, Gudbrandsdalen), with five recorded impressions

*Aerial photo of Lom stave church. 2017.*
*Photo courtesy of Christian Flaaten.*

## Lom Kirke. (Lom Church, Square Format) ca. 1935–1938

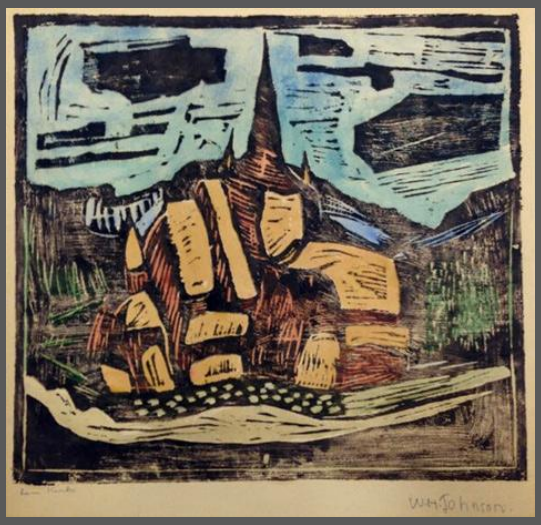
Seven known impressions.

In the square-format version of Lom Kirke, the church is harmoniously integrated into the surrounding landscape. The format allows for a balanced composition in which both the dramatic silhouette of the Lomseggen mountains and the expansive sky are given equal visual weight, reinforcing the interplay between architecture and nature.

Only two works from the square-format series are known to bear titles: the impression held at the Oakland Museum of California and the impression at the Library of Congress, both titled Lom Kirke.

Lom Kirke. (Lom Church, square Format) ca. 1935–1938. Object Number: WHJ-BP-SCA-00018. Block print on paper. (Woodcut). Hand-colored with earthy reds, ochres, deep blue, green, and pale blue, with dark brown cloud accents. Size: 17 1⁄8 x 16 in. (43.4 x 40.6 cm) irregular. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation.Smithsonian American Art Museum, 1983.95.20

Lom Kirke. (Lom Church, square Format) ca. 1935–1938. Object Number: WHJ-BP-SCA-00019. Block print on paper. (Woodcut). Hand-colored with deep red, ochre yellow, and white highlights against a dark brown-black background. Size: 16 5/8 x 15 7/16 inches (42.2 x 39.2 cm). Provenance: Gift of the Philadelphia Commercial Museum (also known as the Philadelphia Civic Center Museum). Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Accession no: 2004-111-724.



Lom Kirke. (Lom Church, square Format) ca. 1935–1938. Object Number: WHJ-BP-SCA-00020. Block print on paper. (Woodcut). Hand-colored with earthy reds, ochres, and deep browns; set against a backdrop of blue sky and green terrain. Signed W.H. Johnson at lower right. Titled Lom Kirke at lower left. Size: H: 14.5 in, W: 14 in. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Courtesy of Oakland Museum of California (OMCA). Accession no: A67.62.13

Lom Kirke. (Lom Church, square Format) ca. 1935–1938. Object Number: WHJ-BP-SCA-00021. Block print on paper. (Woodcut). Hand-colored with a palette of dark brown, muted red, yellow-orange, and soft green. Size: H: 16 1/8 in. W: 16 in. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Hampton University Museum & Archives. Accession no: 67.44.32

Lom Kirke. (Lom Church, square Format) ca. 1935–1938. Object Number:  WHJ-BP-SCA-00022. Block print on paper. (Woodcut). Size:  Height 40 cm. Width 41 cm. Provenance: Estate of Holcha Krake; by descent to her grandniece, Johanna Voll. Christoph Voll Estate collection.

Lom Kirke. (Lom Church, square Format) ca. 1935–1938. Object Number:  WHJ-BP-SCA-00023. Hand-colored block print on paper ( (Woodcut). Titled and signed on verso. Annotated: "NOR-173 (6)." Provenance: Harmon Foundation. Library of Congress. Item 2003688149

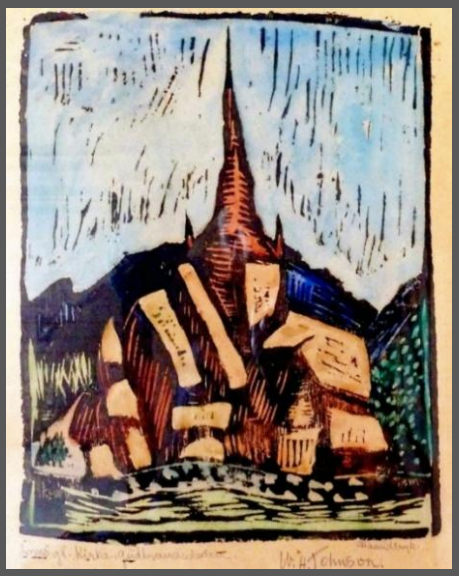
Lom Kirke. (Lom Church, square Format) ca. 1935–1938. Object Number:  WHJ-BP-SCA-00024. Hand-colored block print on paper (Woodcut). Size: 22"h x 21"w x 1"d. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Fisk University Galleries. Accession no: # 0146

## Lom Gl. Kirke, Gudbrandsdalen (The Old Church in Gudbrandsdalen. Vertical Format). ca. 1935–1938.

Six known impressions.

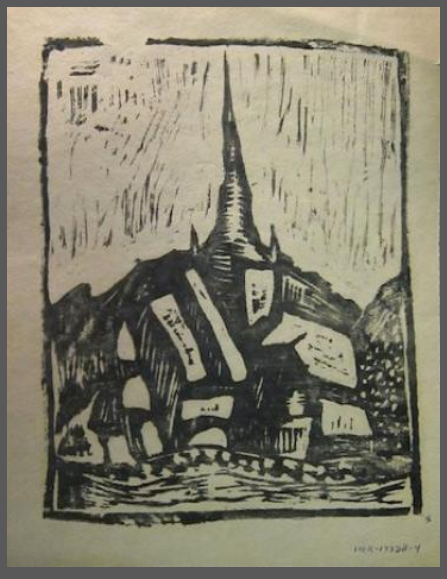
In the vertical-format version of Lom Kirke, the composition accentuates the soaring spire of the stave church, emphasizing a pronounced sense of upward movement and spiritual elevation. The compressed spatial depth achieved through a foreshortened foreground and a looming mountain backdrop concentrates the viewer's attention on the church's striking silhouette, intensifying its monumental presence within the landscape.

Only one impression from this vertical-format series is known to bear a title: the example held at Campbell Fine Art. This impression carries the title Lom Gl. Kirke, Gudbrandsdalen (The Old Church in Gudbrandsdalen).



Lom Gl. Kirke, Gudbrandsdalen (The Old Church in Gudbrandsdalen. Vertical Format). ca. 1935–1938. Object Number: WHJ-BP-SCA-00025. Block print on paper. (Woodcut). Hand-colored with warm ochres, burnt sienna, and deep reds; contrasted by blue sky and dark green mountains. Signed W.H. Johnson to lower right. Inscribed in Danish: Haandtryk (Printed by hand). Titled to lower left: Lom Gl. Kirke, Gudbrandsdalen (the old church in Gudbrandsdalen). Provenance: Private collection. Campbell Fine Art. 1323 Travelers Rest, 29690. SC, United States.

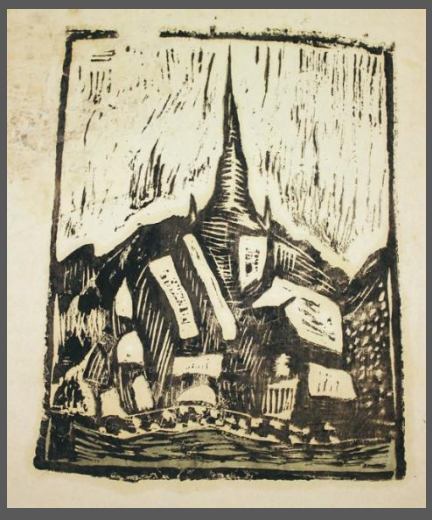
Lom Gl. Kirke, Gudbrandsdalen (The Old Church in Gudbrandsdalen. Vertical Format). ca. 1935–1938. Object Number: WHJ-BP-SCA-00026. Block print on paper. (Woodcut). Hand-colored with muted ochres and burgundy tones, set against a pale blue sky and deep green mountains. Signed W.H. Johnson to lower right. Size: 30 x 22 cm. Provenance: Private Danish collection. Exhibited at: William H. Johnson og Holcha Krake. Et Kunstnerpar i 30ernes Kerteminde. Johannes Larsen Museum, 1 may-14 June, 1998.



Lom Gl. Kirke, Gudbrandsdalen (The Old Church in Gudbrandsdalen. Vertical Format). ca. 1935–1938. Object Number: WHJ-BP-SCA-00027. Block print on paper. (Woodcut). Provenance: Civic Center Museum Collection, African American Museum in Philadelphia. Object ID: 2010.001.400

Lom Gl. Kirke, Gudbrandsdalen (The Old Church in Gudbrandsdalen. Vertical Format). ca. 1935–1938. Object Number: WHJ-BP-SCA-00028. Block print on paper. (Woodcut). Size: H: 22 1/8 in. W: 18 ½ in. D: 1 13/16 in. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Hampton University Museum & Archives. Accession no: 67.44.4

Lom Gl. Kirke, Gudbrandsdalen (The Old Church in Gudbrandsdalen. Vertical Format). ca. 1935–1938. Object Number:  WHJ-BP-SCA-00029. Block print on paper. (Woodcut). Size: 21"h x 17"w x 1"d. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Fisk University Galleries. Accession no: # 0545



Lom Gl. Kirke, Gudbrandsdalen (The Old Church in Gudbrandsdalen. Vertical Format). ca. 1935–1938. Object Number:  WHJ-BP-SCA-00030. Block print on paper. (Woodcut). hand-colored with muted green accents. Size: 28,6 x 34,3 cm. Provenance: Estate of Holcha Krake; by descent to her grandniece, Johanna Voll. Private Collection.

Lom Church. ca. 1935-1938. Watercolor and pencil on paper.
Oakland Museum of California. Accession no, A67.62.8.

## Volda Fjord, Norway, ca. 1935–1938

Four known impressions.

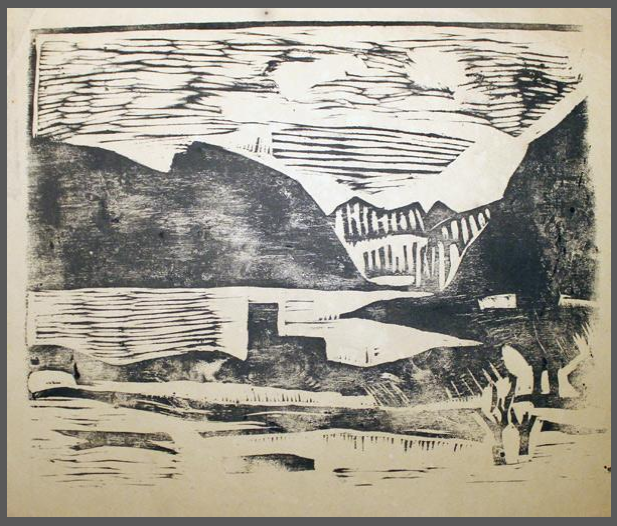
In Volda Fjord, Norway, Johnson distils the landscape into bold graphic contrasts and simplified forms. Dark, solid masses define the mountains, while bands of incised lines suggest rippling water and drifting clouds overhead. Through reductive carving and rhythmic line work, he transforms the fjord into a dynamic interplay of light and shadow, conveying both the grandeur of the landscape and its quiet, contemplative atmosphere.

At the center of the composition appears a sharply defined triangular form that reads as a structure nestled between the mountains. This feature may represent a stylized depiction of Volda Stone Church (Voldskyrkja), consecrated in 1932 and a prominent landmark overlooking the fjord.

Johnson and Krake first arrived in Volda in September 1935 and used the village as their base for the following two years. During this period, Johnson produced numerous works depicting the region and its dramatic natural surroundings, drawing inspiration from the eighteen-kilometre-long Voldsfjord and the distinctive character of western Norway.

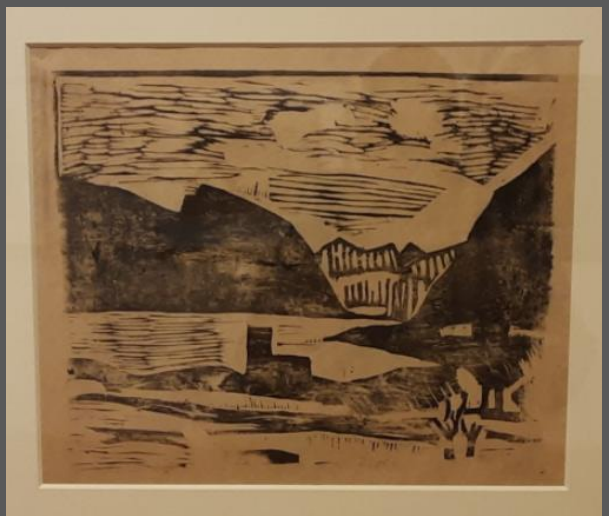
Volda Stone Church (Voldskyrkja), overlooking the Voldsfjord. Photograph by Kjeks, 2006.

Volda Fjord, Norway, ca. 1935–1938. Object Number: WHJ-BP-SCA-00031. Block print on paper. (Woodcut). Hand-colored with ochre, black, pale pink, green, and deep blue. Signed lower right: Wm H. Johnson. Titled lower left: Volda Fjord-Norway. Inscribed on backing board in script: woodcut-Hand colored /Wm Johnson/27 W 15 St. N.Y.C./Volda Fjord-Norway/exh. December 1940 Artists' Gallery/exhibited Jan. 14-28th 41. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Smithsonian American Art Museum, 1967.59.896. Exhibited: The New York Public Library, Countee Cullen Branch, December 5, 1956-March 1, 1957



Volda Fjord, Norway, ca. 1935–1938. Object Number: WHJ-BP-SCA-00032. Block print on paper. (Woodcut). Size: 38 x 44 cm. Provenance: The estate of Holcha Krake; by descent to her grandniece, Johanna Voll. The Wright Foundation for Southern Art. Florence County Museum.

Volda Fjord, Norway, ca. 1935–1938. Object Number: WHJ-BP-SCA-00033. Block print on paper. (Woodcut) Signed Wm H. Johnson to lower right. Inscribed: Signed NOR-88-B. Size: 13.5 x 15.75 in. 34.29 x 40.01 cm. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Courtesy of the Amistad Research Center, New Orleans, LA. Accession Number. ARCHAR.WHJO.1934.13



Volda Fjord, Norway, ca. 1935–1938. Object Number: WHJ-BP-SCA-00034. Block print on paper. (Woodcut) Size: 23 1/8 in. W: 25 in. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Hampton University Museum & Archives. Object ID: 67.44.7

## Moon-Rise, Star-Rise, ca. 1935–1938.

In Moon-Rise, Star-Rise, Johnson depicts two silhouetted figures seen from behind, gazing across a fjord framed by towering mountains. Reflections in the water subtly mirror the figures and landscape, while bold contrasts and visible woodgrain textures emphasize the physical act of carving and give the composition a tactile expressive depth.

The print was likely produced during Johnson's years in rural Norway (1935–38), possibly during his and Krake's stay in Svolvær in the summer of 1937. Known as the "land of the midnight sun," the region's continuous daylight and dramatic fjord landscape left a lasting impression, reflected in Krake's recollection of daily sea bathing in waters "like the French Riviera."

The title may reference the African American spiritual "I Know Moon-Rise," which begins, "I know moon-rise, I know star-rise, / Lay dis body down." Associated with themes of rest, the afterlife, and spiritual reflection, the song appears in the landmark 1867 collection Slave Songs of the United States.

At the same time, both the title and composition resonate with Edvard Munch's print Måneoppgang (Moonrise) from the Alpha and Omega series (1908–1909), a connection further enriched by Johnson's meeting with Munch in Oslo in 1935.

No original impressions of Moon-Rise, Star-Rise, are known, suggesting the block was either never printed or that early impressions have been lost or remain undiscovered. The only extant impression is a posthumous trial print from the original woodblock, pulled by Øbro Kunsthandel, Copenhagen, 2026.

William H. Johnson. Moon-Rise, Star-Rise, ca. 1935–38. Carved woodblock, titled and signed verso. 9 x 9 cm. Provenance: the artist to Niels Lindberg, Nr. Broby, Funen; private

Edvard Munch. Moonrise. 1908-1909. Lithograph. Image credit: The Munch Museum. MM.G.00306-102.

Moon-Rise, Star-Rise. ca, 1935-38. Object Number:  WHJ-BP-SCA-00035. Trial impression (test print) from the original woodblock.  9 x 9 cm. Øbro Kunsthandel. Copenhagen. 2026.

## Church by Lake II. ( Farmstead by Lake ) ca, 1935–1938.

Four known impressions.

In Church by Lake II, Johnson depicts a rural farmstead set along a lakeshore. The motif recurs in related works from the same period, including Church in the Country (ca. 1935–1938, oil on burlap), pictured below, and Church in the Country, Sunset (ca. 1935–1938, watercolor and pencil on paper, Smithsonian American Art Museum, 1967.59.20). The designation Church by Lake II implies the existence of additional versions, though no other impressions are presently known.

The title appears to be misleading, as the structure depicted is not a church but a traditional Norwegian stabbur (storehouse).

In rural Norwegian gårdstuner (farmsteads), a small bell tower was often mounted above the storehouse so its sound could carry across the surrounding fields. Beyond its practical function of signaling mealtimes, the bell also regulated the daily rhythms of agricultural life.

The title may therefore reflect a later misinterpretation of the building, possibly introduced during early cataloguing by the Harmon Foundation, as it appears unlikely that Johnson himself would have misidentified the structure.

Although the precise location has not been identified, the scene likely depicts one of the lakeside farmsteads typical of rural Norway, a region that Johnson and Krake explored extensively between 1935 and 1938.

William H. Johnson. Church in the Country. ca. 1935-1938. Oil on burlap. Smithsonian American Art Museum, 1967.59.898

Stabbur (storehouse) with meal bell, Nørstegård farm, Hundorp, Norway, ca. 1928. Image credit: Jørgen Sikker Elstad.

Church by Lake II, ( Farmstead by Lake ) ca. 1935-1938. Object Number:  WHJ-BP-SCA-00036. Block print on paper mounted on paperboard. Hand-colored with earthy reds, deep greens, ochre, and blue, set against a pale yellow and green sky. Size: 11 x 12 1⁄4 in. (28.0 x 31.2 cm) Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation.  Smithsonian American Art Museum, 1967.59.888

Church by Lake II. ( Farmstead by Lake ) Circa 1935-1938. Object Number:  WHJ-BP-SCA-00037. Block print on fibrous handmade buff paper. (Woodcut). Artist's proof. Size: 349 x 349 mm; 13 3/4x13 3/4 inches, 1/8- to 1/2-inch margins.Provenance: the estate of Holcha Krake; by descent to her grandniece, Johanna Voll. Christoph Voll Estate collection.

Church by Lake II. ( Farmstead by Lake ) Circa 1935-1938. Object Number:  WHJ-BP-SCA-00038. Block print on paper. (Woodcut). Signed W.H. Johnson. Size: H: 23 1/8 in. W: 25 5/16 in. D: 1 13/16 in. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Hampton University Museum & Archives. Object ID: 67.44.10

Church by Lake II, ( Farmstead by Lake ) ca. 1935-1938. Object Number:  WHJ-BP-SCA-00039. hand colored woodcut on paper. Signed in pencil on verso. Annotated: "NOR-175(2)." Provenance: Harmon Foundation. Library of Congress. Item 2003688144.

## Chalets by Jostedal Glacier (Grepstadstøylen) ca. 1935-1937.

Four known impressions.

In Chalets by Jostedal Glacier, Johnson depicts a cluster of wooden chalets nestled within the mountainous landscape of Jølster, a rural region in Vestland County, Norway. The print was likely derived from the painting Jølster (ca. 1936), a motif that recurs in several of his sketches and reflects his direct experience of the area during his travels with Holcha Krake between 1935 and 1936.

Johnson was deeply inspired by the region's majestic mountains and verdant valleys, often working from vantage points also used by the Norwegian painter Nikolai Astrup (1880–1928), known for his intensely colored paintings and woodcuts of his native landscape. The wooden chalets depicted in both Johnson's and Astrup's works were once thought to represent Befringstøylen, but have since been identified as Grepstadstøylen (the Grepstad Mountain Farm).

The earliest documented reference to the print dates to 1935, when Johnson and Krake presented an impression to Daniel Ludvigson Klakegg in gratitude for his hospitality during their stay at his farmstead, Myrane, in Jølster. The next recorded reference dates to May 1937, when Johnson presented an impression to the board of the Volda Art Association during their two-person farewell exhibition in Volda. Four months later, in September 1937, another impression was included in Johnson's solo exhibition at the Trondheim Art Society (Trondhjems Kunstforening).

Nikolai Astrup. Befringstøylene (Grepstadstøylen) 1920. Colored woodcut. Foto: Dag Fosse

William H. Johnson. Jølster, ca. 1936. Oil painting. Image credit: Doyle: Impressionist & Modern Art. November 2019.

Chalets by Jostedal Glacier (Grepstadstøylen) ca. 1935-1937. Object Number:  WHJ-BP-SCA-00040. Block print on paper. (Woodcut) Hand-colored with pale blue, ochre, deep green, and black, with soft pink and icy blue highlights. Size: 14 x 19 5⁄8 in. (35.5 x 49.9 cm) irregular. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Smithsonian American Art Museum, 1983.95.19

Chalets by Jostedal Glacier (Grepstadstøylen) ca. 1935-1937.  Object Number:  WHJ-BP-SCA-00041. Block print on paper. (Woodcut) Titled on verso: Chalets by Jostedal Glacier. Hand-colored with deep blues, purples, and greens, with peach and teal accents. Size: 12 x 17 1/4 in. 30.5 x 43.8 cm. Provenance: The Harmon Foundation, New York; acquired from the above Mr. and Mrs. Douglas Younger, New York. (Assistant Director at the Harmon Foundation). Sold at Potomack Auctions, Alexandria, VA, US. October 8, 2024. Lot 2042.

Chalets by Jostedal Glacier. (Grepstadstøylen). 1935. Object Number:  WHJ-BP-SCA-00042. Block print on paper. ( Woodcut). Inscribed on verso: Til Hr. Daniel i vennskab fra Holcha Krake og W.H.Johnson. (To Mr. Daniel in friendship from Holcha Krake and W.H.Johnson). Size: 29 x 42 cm. Provenance: Daniel Ludvigson Klakegg. Sold at Blomqvist Auctions. Stockholm.

Chalets by Jostedal Glacier (Grepstadstøylen) ca. 1935-1937. Object Number:  WHJ-BP-SCA-00043. Size: 12 x 17 1/2 in. (30.5 x 44.5 cm.) Woodcut on a heavy, fibrous buff paper. Inscribed "Norway Scene" in pencil and with a nude sketch in pencil, verso. Inscribed with inventory number "NOR-331(2)" by the Harmon Foundation in pencil on the frame back board. Provenance: Private collection, Washington, DC. Sold October 7, 2025. Swann Galleries. New York, NY, US. Lot 11.

# EXHIBITION

## WATER COLORS

## WOODCUTS COLORED

from travels in Europe & Africa

by

## WmH JOHNSON

and

## TAPESTRIES and CERAMICS

by

## HOLCHA KRAKE

at

## THE ARTIST'S GALLERY

33 W. 8th St.

FEB 14—28th

DAILY 10 AM 9 PM

Sunb 1 PM 9 PM

INVITATION

## 7. Harlem, New York

In November 1938, after twelve years abroad, William H. Johnson returned to the United States, stepping into a markedly different cultural and economic landscape. He and Holcha Krake settled in an apartment at 27 West 15th Street, just outside Greenwich Village in New York City. They returned to a nation on the brink of war, facing limited financial resources and an increasingly uncertain art market, conditions that would shape the next phase of Johnson's career.

To support himself, Johnson accepted a teaching position at the Harlem Community Art Center from 1939 to 1942, a formative period in both his life and artistic practice. Teaching in Harlem offered him something largely absent during his years in Europe: sustained engagement with the Black community.

Always responsive to his surroundings, Johnson began portraying the rhythms of daily life, the small dramas unfolding in streets, dance halls, and neighborhoods, capturing the vitality of Harlem's urban culture. This environment sparked a profound transformation in his work. Moving away from the portraits and landscapes that had defined his Scandinavian years, he turned increasingly toward the human figure and scenes rooted in the Black American experience.

Inspired by Harlem's cultural energy, Johnson developed a body of work grounded in community, cultural pride, and social consciousness an approach he described as "depicting his own people."

Johnsons Harlem, New York series consists of six individual works.

Harlem Church, ca. 1939–1942.

Harlem Street with Church, ca. 1939-1942.

Untitled (Harlem Street with Couple), ca, 1939-1942.

Untitled (Couple Beneath Streetlamp, Harlem), ca, 1939-1942.

Nightbirds. Ca. 1939–1942

Street People, ca. 1939–1942

*William H. Johnson. Linocut print created as an invitation for the joint exhibition of William H. Johnson and Holcha Krake. Held at The Artist's Gallery, 33 W. 8th Street, New York City, from February 14–28, 1939. Image credit: William H. Johnson Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.*

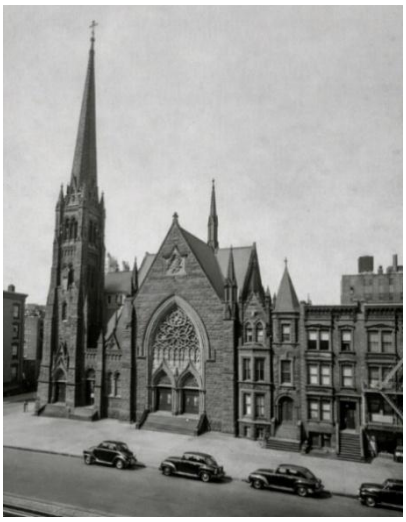
## Harlem Church, ca. 1939–1942.

Two known impressions.

In Harlem Church, Johnson employs bold, angular carving to depict a Gothic-style church set within a dense urban environment. The composition is anchored by a tall steeple crowned with a cross, rising prominently above the surrounding buildings. The structure has been identified as the Ephesus Seventh-day Adventist Church, located at 123rd Street and Lenox Avenue. Founded in 1924, the congregation initially met at 144 West 131st Street before relocating in 1930 to its present site due to overcrowding.

Situated only a short distance from the Harlem Community Art Center at 290 Lenox Avenue, where Johnson taught, the church would have formed part of his daily surroundings, likely encountered in his regular movements through the neighborhood. Its recurring presence in both his prints and tempera paintings suggests that the building held particular visual and cultural significance within his Harlem imagery.

William H. Johnson. Church on Lenox Avenue, ca. 1939-1940, tempera on paper. SAAM., 1967.59.331



Ephesus Seventh-day Adventist Church, Harlem, New York. 1930s. Photographer unknown.

Harlem Church, ca. 1939-1942. Object Number: WHJ-BP-HAR-0001. Block print on paper. (Linocut). Hand-colored. Size: 20 5⁄8 x 12 1⁄2 in. (52.3 x 31.7 cm) irregular. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation, Smithsonian American Art Museum. 1967.59.1114

Harlem Church, ca. 1939-1942. Object Number: WHJ-BP-HAR-0002. Block print on paper. (Linocut). Size: 61 x 42 cm. Provenance: The estate of Holcha Krake; by descent to her grandniece, Johanna Voll. The Wright Foundation for Southern Art. Florence County Museum.

## Harlem Street with Church, ca. 1939-1942.

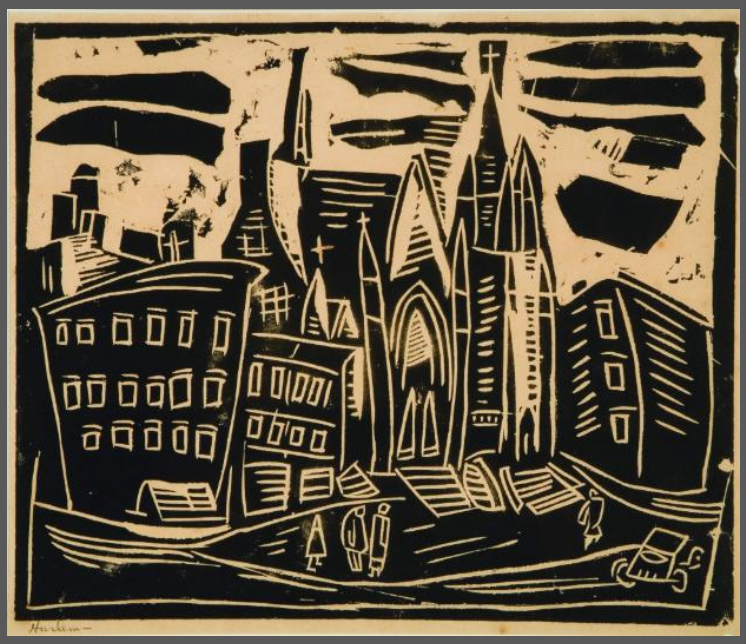
Three known impressions

In Harlem Street with Church, Johnson revisits the Ephesus Seventh-day Adventist Church, this time placing it in a lively urban streetscape.

Unlike the more vertical and spiritually focused Harlem Church, this version emphasizes the church's integration into everyday Harlem life. The Gothic spires and arched windows remain central, but now they are flanked by tightly packed apartment buildings and framed by stylized figures and a passing car in the foreground.

William H. Johnson, Harlem Cityscape with Church, ca. 1939-1940, tempera on paperboard. SAAM, 1967.59.289

Harlem Street with Church, ca. 1939-1942. Object Number: WHJ-BP-HAR-0003. Block print on paper. (Linocut). Hand-colored with a palette of ochre, burnt sienna, pale blue, and black, with fine cream outlines for figures and details. Size: 13 x 14 3⁄4 in. (33.0 x 37.5 cm) irregular, Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Smithsonian American Art Museum. 1967.59.1113



Harlem Street with Church, ca. 1939-1942. Object Number: WHJ-BP-HAR-0004.Block print on paper. (Linocut). Titled Harlem in the lower left corner. Size: 11.75 x 13.5 in. 29.85 x 34.29 cm. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Courtesy of the Amistad Research Center, New Orleans, LA. Accession Number: ARC.HAR.WHJO.1939.16

Harlem Street with Church, ca. 1939-1942. Object Number: WHJ-BP-HAR-0005.Block print on paper. (Linocut). Size: 36,5 x 31,3 (irregular). Provenance: Estate of Holcha Krake; by descent to her grandniece, Johanna Voll. Private Collection.

## Untitled (Harlem Street with Couple), ca, 1939-1942.

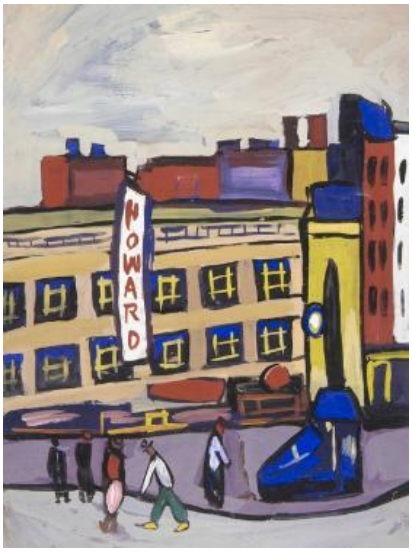
Three known impressions.

In Harlem Street with Couple, Johnson depicts an embracing pair standing in a narrow urban passage at evening. Tall, angular buildings rise on either side, their sharp vertical planes and converging rooflines compressing the space and intensifying the sense of enclosure. The architecture is reduced to stark geometric silhouettes, with rows of windows, slanted roofs, and chimney stacks suggesting the characteristic brownstone row houses of Harlem's early twentieth-century streets.

At the foreground, the woman's elongated figure leans gently toward her partner, her extended posture conveying vulnerability and emotional openness. By contrast, the man's more compact form provides a sense of grounding and protection.

The motif likely derives from Johnson's observations of Harlem's dynamic street life during the late 1930s and early 1940s, when music, dance, and nighttime social activity animated the neighborhood's public spaces.

The composition parallels Johnson's Harlem Street Scene with Full Moon (ca. 1939–1940), in which similar architectural forms frame a narrow roadway between densely packed buildings. A comparable approach appears in City Street Scene (ca. 1939–1940), where Johnson likewise presents figures as integral to a lived social environment.




William H. Johnson, City Street Scene, ca. 1939-1940, tempera on paper. Smithsonian American Art Museum, 1967.59.298

William H. Johnson, Harlem Street Scene with Full Moon, ca. 1939-1940, tempera on paper. Smithsonian American Art Museum, 1967.59.4

Untitled (Harlem Street with Couple), ca, 1939-1942. Object Number: WHJ-BP-HAR-0006. Block print (linocut) on vellum paper. Size: 19 x 25 cm. Provenance: The artist to Niels Lindberg, Nr. Broby, Fyn, Denmark; subsequently in a private Danish collection. Collection of the National Gallery of Denmark (SMK), Copenhagen.

Untitled (Harlem Street with Couple), ca, 1939-1942. Object Number: WHJ-BP-HAR-0007. Block print (linocut) on vellum paper. Inscribed in pencil. W.H. Johnson. Size: 19 x 25 cm. Provenance: The artist to Niels Lindberg, Nr. Broby, Fyn, Denmark. Subsequently part of a private Danish collection.

Untitled (Harlem Street with Couple), ca, 1939-1942. Object Number: WHJ-BP-HAR-0008. Block print (linocut) on vellum paper. Size: 19 x 25 cm. Provenance: The artist to Niels Lindberg, Nr. Broby, Fyn, Denmark. Subsequently part of a private Danish collection.

## Untitled (Couple Beneath Streetlamp, Harlem), ca, 1939-1942.

One known impression

In Couple Beneath Streetlamp, Harlem, Johnson depicts a serene nighttime scene in which a finely dressed couple stands beneath the radiant glow of a streetlamp. The light bursts outward in bold, geometric rays, creating a striking visual contrast that draws the viewer's eye to the couple below.

Elegantly attired and both wearing hats, the woman's tilted at a fashionable angle and the man's complementing his broad-shouldered zoot suit, the couple embody the hallmarks of urban style. They stand side by side in composed stillness, their squared shoulders and elongated forms conveying strength and self-assurance and reinforcing a confident sense of identity.

Set within 1940s Harlem, the scene reflects a social culture in which couples gathered to dance, socialize, and present themselves in their finest attire.

Untitled (Couple Beneath Streetlamp, Harlem), ca, 1939-1942. Object Number: WHJ-BP-HAR-0009. Block print (linocut) on vellum paper. Size: 10 ½ x 16 cm. Provenance: The artist to Niels Lindberg, Nr. Broby, Fyn, Denmark; subsequently in a private Danish collection. Collection of the National Gallery of Denmark (SMK), Copenhagen.

## Nightbirds. Ca. 1939–1942

Six known impressions.

In Nightbirds, Johnson presents a close-up portrait of two stylishly dressed women, likely depicted during a night out or in the quiet early morning hours as they return home. Their refined appearance suggests urban sophistication, while the title evokes Harlem's vibrant nocturnal culture.

The figure on the right, wearing a feathered, tilted hat, bears a resemblance to Johnson's earlier three-quarter view portrait of Holcha Krake (WHJ-BP-HOL-001-005.) It is possible that Johnson intended this image to represent Holcha accompanied by a friend during a night out; however, this identification remains unconfirmed.

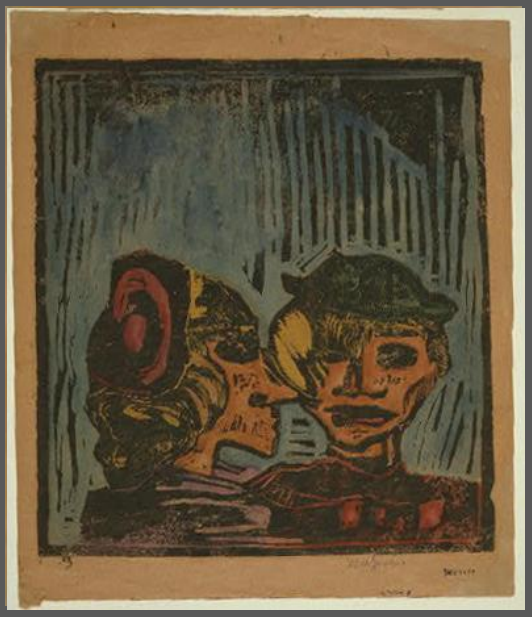
The earliest recorded reference to the print dates to 1939, when a hand-colored impression was exhibited at Johnson and Krake's joint exhibition at The Artists Gallery in New York in February of that year.

*Left: Woodcut portrait of Holcha Krake by William H. Johnson, ca. 1930–1935. Right: Detail from Nightbirds, ca. 1939–1942.*

Nightbirds. Ca. 1939–1942. Object Number: WHJ-BP-HAR-00010. Block print on paper. (Woodcut). Hand-coloured with palette of yellow, red, orange, dark blue, black, brown, grey, and muted green. Size: H: 28 ½ in. W: 26 3/16 in. D: 1 13/16 in. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Hampton University Museum & Archives. Object ID: 67.44.38

Nightbirds. Ca. 1939–1942. Object Number: WHJ-BP-HAR-00011. Block print on paper. (Woodcut). Hand-coloured with shades of blue. Size: H: 17.5 in. W: 16.25 in. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Courtesy of Oakland Museum of California (OMCA). Object number: A67.62.21

Nightbirds. Ca. 1939–1942. Object Number: WHJ-BP-HAR-00012. Block print on paper. (Woodcut). Size: H: 16 ½ in. W: 18 in. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Hampton University Museum & Archives. Object ID: 67.44.34



Nightbirds. Ca. 1939–1942. Object Number: WHJ-BP-HAR-00013. Block print on paper. (Woodcut). Hand-coloured with palette of dark blue, red, yellow, green, and brown tones with black outlines. Signed in pencil W.H. Johnson on verso. Annotated: "NOR-178-A (1). Provenance: From of the Harmon Foundation. Library of Congress, item 2003688150.

Nightbirds. Ca. 1939–1942. Object Number: WHJ-BP-HAR-00014. Block print on brown on thin, pale cream wove paper. (Woodcut). Signed (partial) in pencil, lower margin. Size: 457 x 432 mm. 18 x17 inches, 1/2- to 3/4- inch margins. Provenance: The estate of Holcha Krake; by descent to her grandniece, Johanna Voll. Christoph Voll Estate collection.

Nightbirds. Ca. 1939–1942. Object Number: WHJ-BP-HAR-00015. Block print on paper. (Woodcut). Size: 18 x 17 in. 45.72 x 43.18 cm. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Courtesy of the Amistad Research Center, New Orleans, LA. Accession Number: ARC.HAR.WHJO.1939.15

From left: Holcha Krake and Alma Dahlerup, New York, 1941. Detail from the reception for William H. Johnson's exhibition at the Alma Reed Gallery, May 1941. Image credit: William H. Johnson Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

## Street People, ca. 1939–1942

Five known impressions.

In Street People, Johnson presents a tightly cropped portrayal of an elegant couple. Rendered in bold, carved lines and sharp contrasts, the print distills the figures into simplified, mask-like forms with striking, expressive features. The compressed space intensifies their presence, drawing the viewer into close and immediate engagement with the pair.

Their fashionable hats signal urban sophistication and the distinctive street style of 1940s Harlem. The scene may suggest the couple heading out for an evening of dancing, perhaps at the famed Savoy Ballroom.

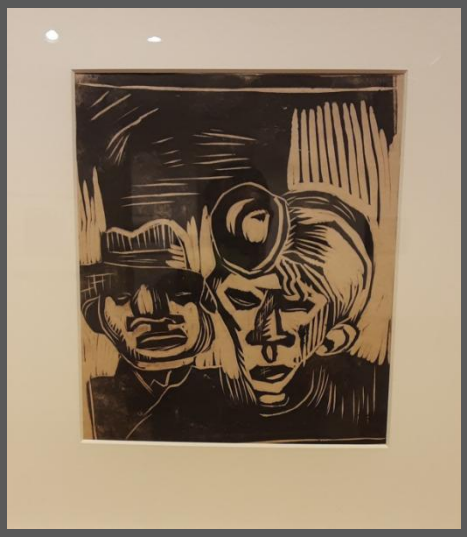
Street People parallel Johnson's painting Street Life, Harlem (ca. 1939–1940), in which a similarly fashionable couple appears dressed to the nines and ready to step into Harlem's vibrant nightlife.

William H. Johnson, Street Life, Harlem, ca. 1939-1940. Oil on plywood. Smithsonian American Art Museum, 1967.59.674

Street People. Ca, 1939- 1942. Object Number: WHJ-BP-HAR-00016. Block print on paper. (Linocut). Signed W.H. Johnson. Hand-coloured with palette of teal, red, yellow, peach, pink, white, and dark green. Size: H: 24 ½ in. W: 18 3/8 in. Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Hampton University Museum & Archives. Object ID: 67.44.39

Street People. Ca, 1939- 1942. Object Number: WHJ-BP-HAR-00017. Block print on paper. (Linocut). Hand-colored with accents of deep red. Signed lower right: W.H. Johnson. Inscribed: Til Holcha Fra Willie. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Courtesy of Oakland Museum of California (OMCA). Object number: A67.62.17

Street People. Ca, 1939- 1942. Object Number: WHJ-BP-HAR-00018. Hand colored block print on paper ( Linocut). Size: 13 1/2 × 15 in. 34.3 × 38.1 cm. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. The Howard University Gallery of Art. Object number 67.4. Illustrated on page 125 in Homecoming: The art and life of William H. Johnson. Richard J Powell (1991)



Street People. Ca, 1939- 1942. Object Number: WHJ-BP-HAR-00019. Block print on paper. (Linocut). Size: H: 25 7/16 in. W: 22 3/8 in.  D: 1 3/4 in. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Hampton University Museum & Archives. Object ID: 67.44.31

Street People. Ca, 1939- 1942. Object Number: WHJ-BP-HAR-00020. Block print on paper. (Linocut). Hand-colored. Size: 22"h x 21"w x 1⅛"d. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Fisk University Galleries. Object ID. #0409.

Couple on Street Dressed for Ball, Harlem, 1935.
Unknown photographer. Courtesy of Edward Paige.

# 8. The Harlem Community Art Center

Between 1939 and 1942, William H. Johnson worked as an art instructor at the Harlem Community Art Center under the Federal Art Project. Located at 290 Lenox Avenue, the Center offered daily classes in painting and drawing, held in both afternoon and evening sessions, and provided structured artistic training to the local community. It also maintained a well-equipped printmaking workshop, supporting experimentation in techniques such as lithography and silkscreen.

During this period, Johnson produced a substantial body of graphic work, including portraits and figure studies drawn from live models, a subject he had rarely pursued since his student years. In these works, he explored the expressive potential of the nude, drawing on the sculptural language of traditional African art to privilege symbolic proportion and bodily presence over strict anatomical realism.

While at the Center, Johnson also transitioned from woodcut to linocut. Unlike wood, linoleum allowed for smoother contours and more fluid lines, resulting in a cleaner and more immediate expressive effect that aligned with his evolving artistic style.

Johnsons Harlem Art Center series consists of 12 individual works.

Sweet Sleep (Reclining Nude by the Sea), ca. 1939–1942.

Sitting Model. ca. 1939-1942.

Female Nude, ca. 1939–1942.

Seated Female Nude, ca. 1939–1942

Untitled (The Bathers), ca. 1939–1942.

Nude Seated- Front View. Ca. 1939-1942.

Seated Nude, ca. 1939-1942.

Nude at Rest, ca. 1939-1942.

Nude Resting. 1939-40.

Nude Recumbent. Ca. 1939-1942.

Lame Man - Full Length, ca. 1939–1942

Lame Man – Bust, ca. 1939–1942



*Students in art classes at the Harlem Art Center. 290 Lenox Avenue, 1938. Photographer David Robbins. Image credit: Archives of American Art*

## Sweet Sleep (Reclining Nude by the Sea), ca. 1939–1942.

Three known impressions.

In Sweet Sleep, Johnson reworks the motif of the reclining nude, drawing on his earlier tempera painting Reclining Female Nude on Red Drape (ca. 1939–1940), created during his tenure at the Harlem Community Art Center.

Also known as Reclining Nude by the Sea, the print presents a stylized female figure set against rhythmic, abstract patterns. Bold contours and exaggerated curves flatten the form, lending it a sense of monumentality while emphasizing expressive impact over anatomical precision.

The figure bears both visual and thematic affinities with Schwangere Frau (Pregnant Woman, 1921), a sculpture by the German artist Christoph Voll. Voll's raw, unidealized depiction of the female body, later condemned as "degenerate art" and destroyed by the Nazi regime in 1937, resonates with Johnson's own approach.

As Johnson's brother-in-law through his wife Holcha Krake, Voll's life and work held deep personal significance. His death in 1939 at the age of forty-two, following years of Nazi persecution, profoundly affected both Johnson and Krake.

Created around the time Johnson learned of Voll's death, Sweet Sleep can be understood as a quiet tribute to Voll's legacy, reflecting a shared artistic vision that presents women not as passive muses, but as powerful, autonomous beings.

William H. Johnson. Reclining Female Nude on Red Drape, ca. 1939-1940, tempera on paper. Smithsonian American Art Museum,1967.59.262.

Christoph Voll's Pregnant Woman at the Degenerate Art Show in Munich 1936. Image: Entartete Kunst. Heidelberger kunstgeschichtliche Abhandlungen,1995.

Sweet Sleep (Reclining Nude by the Sea) Object Number:  WHJ-BP-HCAC-0001. Ca, 1939- 1942.  Block print on paper (Woodcut). Size: 14-1/2 x 16-1/2 inches. Provenance: The estate of Holcha Krake; by descent to her grandniece, Johanna Voll. Sold at Black art auction. Nov. 19, 2022.

Sweet Sleep (Reclining Nude by the Sea) Number: WHJ-BP-HCAC-0002. Ca, 1939- 1942. Block print on holiday card. (Woodcut).  Signed W.H. Johnson. Dimensions: Image: 13 x 14 1/2 inches (33 x 36.8 cm) Sheet: 15 11/16 x 17 1/16 inches (39.8 x 43.3 cm). Provenance: Gift of the Philadelphia Commercial Museum (also known as the Philadelphia Civic Center Museum). Philadelphia, Pennsylvania Accession Number:2004-111-726.

Sweet Sleep (Reclining Nude by the Sea) Ca, 1939- 1942. Object Number:  WHJ-BP-HCAC-0003. Block print on paper (Woodcut). Size: H: 22 7/8 in. W: 23 3/8 in. D: 1 3/4 in. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Hampton University Museum & Archives. Object ID: 67.44.13

## Sitting Model. ca. 1939-1942.

Seven known impressions.

In Sitting Model, Johnson presents a seated woman in a frontal pose, her hands folded neatly in her lap. She wears a tailored dress with a knotted scarf at the neckline, and her upright posture conveys a sense of composure and self-possession. The figure is defined by bold, incised lines and strong contrasts, which flatten the form while emphasizing its structural clarity. Her face is rendered in a stylized, mask-like manner, with simplified features that recall both African sculptural traditions and modernist abstraction.

The identity of the sitter remains uncertain, though she is believed to have been either a student or a staff member at the Harlem Community Art Center, where Johnson taught during this period.

One possible candidate is artist Gwendolyn Knight, who studied painting and sculpture at the Center during Johnson's tenure and also modeled for sculptor Augusta Savage, then director of the Center.

Gwendolyn Knight, mid-1930s.

Gwendolyn Knight (1913–2005) was a Barbadian-born American artist and an important figure of the Harlem Renaissance. Recognized for her expressive figurative paintings, portraits, and prints, she studied at the Harlem Community Art Center under sculptor Augusta Savage, who became a lifelong mentor. It was there that Knight met fellow artist Jacob Lawrence; the two married in 1941 and sustained a lifelong artistic partnership. Photo. University of Washington Press.

Sitting Model. ca. 1939-1942. Object Number: WHJ-BP-HCAC-0004. Block print on paper (Linocut). Hand-coloured with palette of deep green, dark brown, red accents, warm ochre skin tones, and a purple-gray floor. Size: 17 7⁄8 x 12 in. 45.4 x 30.6 cm. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation, Smithsonian American Art Museum, 1967.59.1112.

Sitting Model. ca. 1939-1942. Object Number: WHJ-BP-HCAC-0005. Block print on paper (Linocut). Hand-coloured with palette of black, blue, red, warm brown, and yellow contour lines. Size: 18 x 12 in. Provenance: From the Collection of David C. Driskell. Object ID: 2014.08.003. Photography by Greg Staley, 2018.

Sitting Model. ca. 1939-1942. Object Number: WHJ-BP-HCAC-0006. Block print on paper (Linocut). Hand-coloured with palette of pink, blue, yellow, teal, orange, and black outlines. Size: H: 17.13 in, W: 12.25 in. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Courtesy of Oakland Museum of California (OMCA). Object number: A67.62.24

Sitting Model. ca. 1939-1942. Object Number: WHJ-BP-HCAC-0007. Block print on paper (Linocut). Hand-coloured in black with cream tones. Signed Will. H. Johnson at lower right. Size: 18.5 x 12.5 in. (46.99 x 31.75 cm) Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Courtesy of the Amistad Research Center, New Orleans, LA. Accession Number: ARC.HAR.WHJO.1939.19.

Sitting Model. ca. 1939-1942. Object Number: WHJ-BP-HCAC-0008. Block print on paper (Linocut). Hand-coloured in black with cream tones. Size: 18 ¾ x 12 inches. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Collection of Hampton University Museum. Illustrated on page 104 in William H. Johnson: Revisiting an African American Modernist. Kenneth G. Rodger. North Carolina Central University Art Museum in Durham, North Carolina (2006).

Sitting Model. ca. 1939-1942. Object Number: WHJ-BP-HCAC-0009. Block print on paper (Linocut). Size: H: 29 in. W: 23 in. D: 1 5/8 in. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Hampton University Museum & Archives. Object ID: 67.44.26

Sitting Model. ca. 1939-1942. Object Number: WHJ-BP-HCAC-0010. Block print on paper (Linocut). Size: H: 18 5/8 in. W: 12 ½ in. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Hampton University Museum & Archives. Object ID: 67.44.9

Gwendolyn Knight (center) standing next to the artist Jacob Lawrence, and William H. Johnson (left, in a painter's smock). Harlem Community Art Center, June 1939. Image credit: William H. Johnson Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

## Female Nude, ca. 1939–1942

One Known Impression.

In Female Nude, Johnson presents a seated female figure in a studio setting, using bold, simplified carving to create a highly abstracted composition. The figure is outlined in white against a solid black field, with only a few incised lines to suggest key features such as the bust, fingers, and the curve of the seated posture. The background includes a pair of vertical lines that imply the presence of drapery, situating the figure within a traditional studio environment.

Although the Smithsonian American Art Museum currently dates the work to 1930–1935, its medium, linoleum rather than wood, along with its studio setting, suggests a later production during Johnson's Harlem period from 1939 to 1942, when he was actively experimenting with linoleum as a printmaking surface.

A useful comparison is Seated Female Nude in Profile (ca. 1939–1940), a tempera on paper created during Johnson's tenure at the Harlem Community Art Center, depicting a female figure in the same pose against a similarly draped backdrop.

Seated Female Nude in Profile, ca. 1939-1940. Smithsonian American Art Museum. 1967.59.220R-V

Female Nude, ca. 1939–1942. Object Number:  WHJ-BP-HCAC-00011. Block print on paper (Linocut) Size: 12 1⁄8 x 8 7⁄8 in. 30.8 x 22.5 cm. Provenance: Gift of Mrs. Douglas E. Younger. (Assistant Director at the Harmon Foundation). Smithsonian American Art Museum, 1971.138.

## Seated Female Nude, ca. 1939–1942

One Known Impression

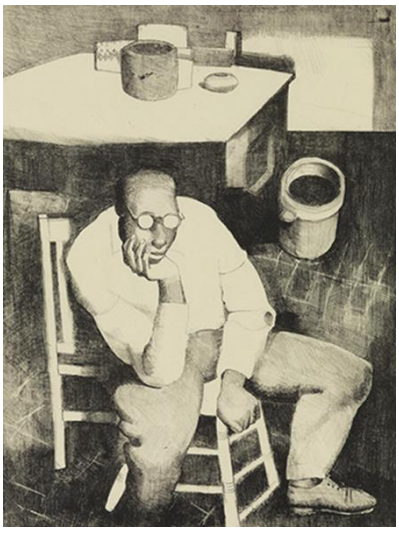
In Seated Female Nude, Johnson presents a frontal figure, her body broad and heavy, with legs apart and hands resting firmly on her thighs. She sits on a plain wooden chair, framed by vertical strokes that suggest a draped studio backdrop, while the surrounding space remains spare and minimally defined, directing full attention to the figure's mass and presence. The model's face is simplified and minimally detailed, shifting emphasis away from individual identity and toward the figure's structural and expressive qualities.

This work is particularly significant as Johnson's only known lithograph. Unlike his more widely produced block prints, lithography required specialized equipment and access to a printing press, suggesting that it was likely created between 1939 and 1942 during his time at the Harlem Community Art Center, where such facilities were available.

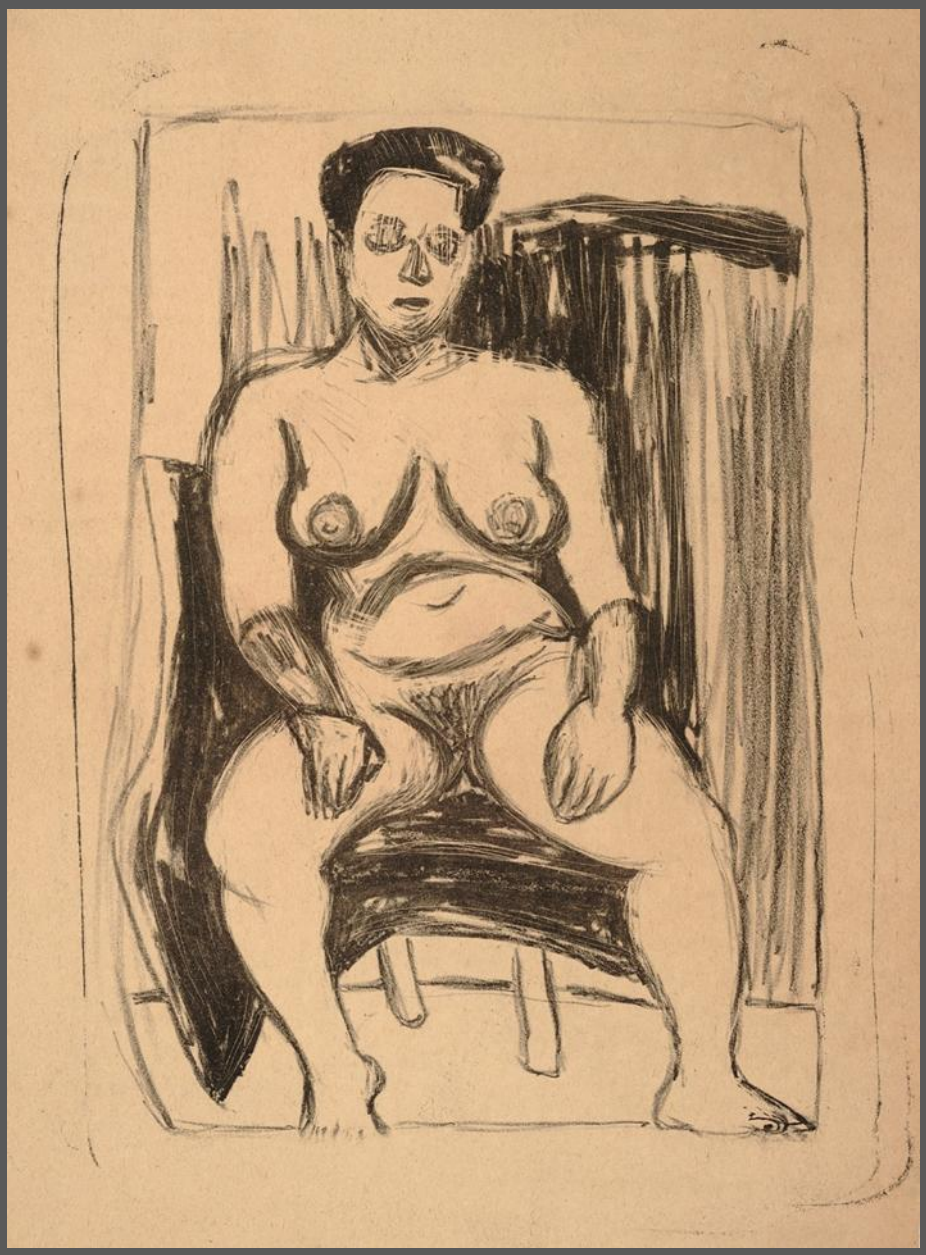
During this period, Johnson may have studied lithographic techniques with fellow artist and instructor Ronald Joseph (1910–1992), who also taught prominent artists such as Robert Blackburn, Jacob Lawrence, and Gwendolyn Knight.

Christoph Voll (1897–1939), Standing Female Nude, watercolor c. 1927. Voll Estate.

*Johnson's lithograph echoes his brother-in-law Christoph Voll's emphasis on the corporeal presence of the female body, foregrounding weight, tension, and materiality over idealized form.*



Portrait of Printmaker Robert Blackburn at the Harlem Community Art Center, surrounded by tools of the printmaking trade. Lithograph by Ronald Joseph, ca. 1937. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Image source: Art Resource, NY.



Seated Female Nude, ca. 1939-1942. Object Number: WHJ-BP-HCAC-00012. Lithograph on paper. Size: 18 1⁄8 x 12 1⁄4 in. (46.0 x 31.1 cm) irregular. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation, Smithsonian American Art Museum, 1967.59.207.

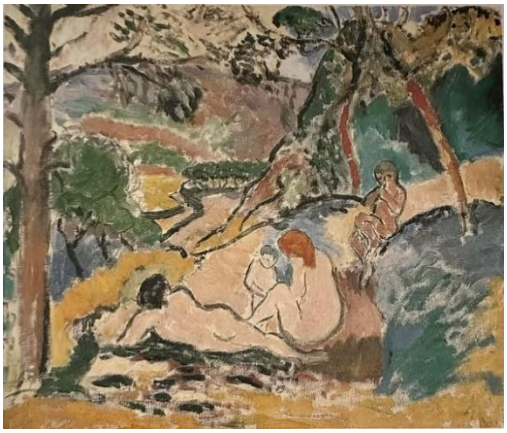
## Untitled (The Bathers), ca. 1939–1942.

One known impression.

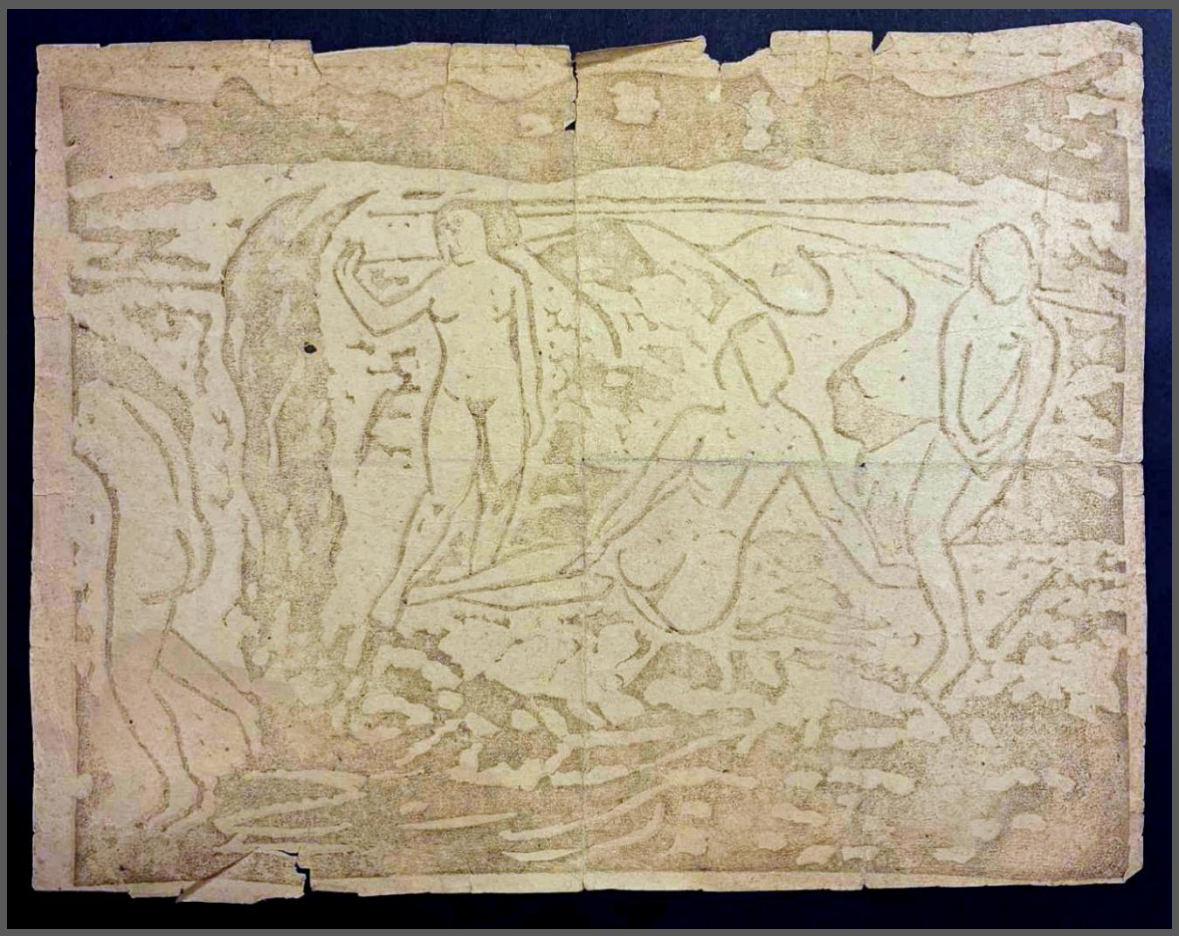
In The Bathers, Johnson reinterprets the classical theme of the nude in nature, presenting four female figures dispersed across a gently undulating landscape. The composition is built from spare, deliberate lines that define bodies reduced to their essential forms, elongated, flattened, and largely devoid of detail. Rather than standing apart from their surroundings, the figures merge visually with the terrain, their contours mirroring the rhythms of hills, water, and sky.

Although the subject aligns with a long tradition explored by artists such as Renoir and Matisse, Johnson rejects their emphasis on softness and painterly sensuality. Instead, he adopts a more austere and graphic approach, using simplification and repetition to create figures that read as strong, symbolic presences. The result is a composition that feels at once timeless and modern, where a familiar motif is reworked into a more direct and personal visual language.

Art historian Richard J. Powell highlights Henri Matisse's importance to William H. Johnson and also suggests that Johnson may have attended the major Matisse exhibition at the Pierre Matisse Gallery in December 1938, shortly after returning to New York (Powell, 1988).



Henri Matisse. Pastoral (1905). Oil on canvas. Credit: Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris.



Untitled (The Bathers), ca. 1939–1942. Object Number:  WHJ-BP-HCAC-00013. Linocut on paper. 40 x 30 cm. Private collection. Denmark.

## Nude Seated- Front View. Ca. 1939-1942

One known impression.

In Nude Seated-Front View, Johnson presents a frontal depiction of a seated nude figure rendered with calm and assured composure. Constructed through bold contours and simplified planes, the figure is integrated into a stylized studio setting defined by abstract grids, linear marks, and dotted forms. These surrounding elements introduce a subtle visual rhythm that activates the background while preserving the composition's overall clarity and structural balance.

The figure's curvilinear silhouette, along with her enlarged hands and feet, reflects Johnson's engagement with the formal language of African sculpture, in which proportion and scale function as expressive devices rather than as markers of anatomical accuracy.

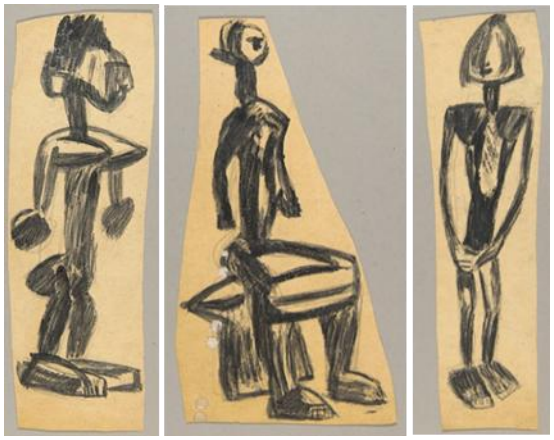
Pages from William H. Johnson's personal scrapbook (ca. 1930–1947) reveal his close study of African and prehistoric sculpture. These clippings, which include photographs of ethnographic figures and ancient fertility idols, reflect Johnson's deep engagement with non-Western art forms. They offer valuable insight into the visual sources that informed his evolving modernist language. Courtesy of the Wright Foundation for Southern Art, Florence County Museum.

Nude Seated-Front View, ca. 1939-1942. Object Number: WHJ-BP-HCAC-00014. Block print on paper. (Linocut). Hand-colored with warm cream tones. Size: 17 7⁄8 x 14 1⁄4 in. 45.5 x 36.1 cm. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Smithsonian American Art Museum, 1967.59.1141

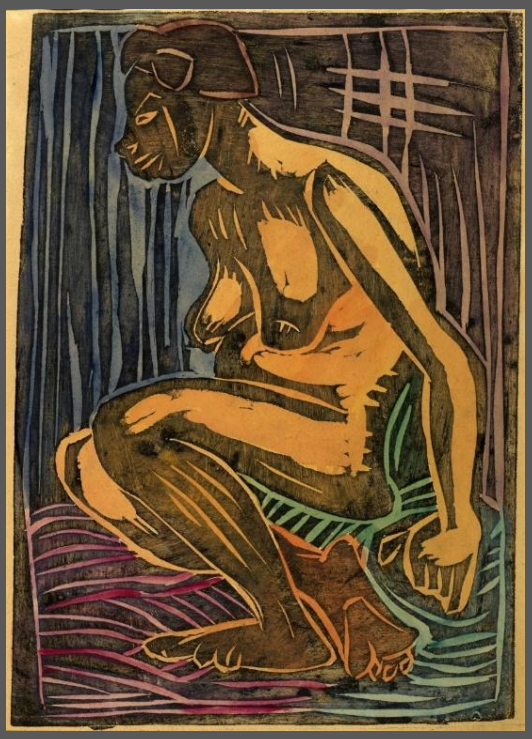
## Seated Nude, ca. 1939-1942.

Three known impressions.

In Seated Nude, Johnson depicts a female figure whose elongated limbs and sharply defined contours create a distinctly sculptural presence. Her forward-leaning posture conveys both tension and introspection, while the deliberately simplified and subtly distorted anatomy emphasizes rhythmic line over naturalistic detail. The figure recalls the sculptural language of African art, lending the composition a powerful, rhythmic, and assertive physical presence.



Created during his tenure at the Harlem Community Art Center, these studies reflect Johnson's sustained engagement with African sculptural traditions. Based on catalogue photographs from the Museum of Modern Art's 1935 exhibition African Negro Art, the drawings reveal Johnson's fascination with Western Sudanic sculpture and its expressive anatomical distortions. William H. Johnson. Studies of African Figures, ca. 1939. Tempera and pencil on paper. SAAM. Accession nos. 1967.59.460, 1967.59.462, 1967.59.463.



Seated Nude, ca. 1939-1942. Object Number: WHJ-BP-HCAC-00015. Block print on paper. (Linocut). Hand-colored in deep browns, warm ochres, muted oranges, with blue, green, and red accents in the background. Size: 15 3⁄8 x 11 5⁄8 in. 39 x 29.4 cm. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Smithsonian American Art

Seated Nude, ca. 1939-1942. Object Number: WHJ-BP-HCAC-00016. Block print on paper. (Linocut). Size: H: 24 ½ in. W: 19 1/8 in. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Hampton University Museum & Archives. Object ID: 67.44.15

Seated Nude, ca. 1939-1942. Object Number: WHJ-BP-HCAC-00017. Block print on paper. (Linocut). Size: H: 17 13/16 in. W: 12 in. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Hampton University Museum & Archives. Object ID: 67.44.42

## Nude at Rest, ca. 1939-1942.

One known impression.

In Nude at Rest, Johnson portrays a female model reclining against a chair within a stylized studio interior enriched by patterned textiles and decorative elements. Her elongated limbs and simplified anatomy emphasize rhythmic contour over naturalism, recalling the sculptural language of African art.

Although the Smithsonian American Art Museum dates the work to 1935–1938, its use of linoleum rather than wood, together with its stylistic characteristics, suggests it was more likely produced during Johnson's tenure at the Harlem Community Art Center (1939–1942), when he began experimenting with linoleum as a printmaking surface.

The print closely echoes Johnson's painting Nude, ca. 1939, in which a female model with similar bodily proportions appears within a comparable studio interior enriched by patterned fabrics and floral arrangements. It is plausible that the same model posed for both works, although this cannot be confirmed definitively.

William H. Johnson, Nude Ca. 1939. Oil on burlap. Smithsonian American Art Museum, 1967.59.1135

Nude at Rest, ca. 1939-1942. Object Number: WHJ-BP-HCAC-00018. Block print on paperboard. (Linoleum cut). Size: 28 x 18 7⁄8 in. (71.1 x 47.9 cm) irregular. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Smithsonian American Art Museum, 1967.59.975.

## Nude Resting. 1939-42.

One known impression.

In Nude Resting, Johnson employs bold contrasts and simplified forms to portray a reclining nude figure.  The composition closely parallels the print, Female Nude (WHJ-BP-HCAC-00011), particularly in its abstracted approach.

In both pieces, Johnson reduces the figure to its essential shapes, using strong outlines and minimal detail to convey a sense of presence and quiet poise.

Nude Resting. 1939-40. Object Number:  WHJ-BP-HCAC-00019.  Block print on paper (Linocut). Size: H: 20 5/8" W: 16 5/8" D: 3/4". Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Hampton University Museum & Archives. Object ID: 67.44.12

## Nude Recumbent. Ca. 1939-1942.

Three known impressions.

In Nude Recumbent, Johnson renders a female nude in a dynamic, crawling pose, her arched back and bent limbs creating a sense of tension and movement. Carved in bold, angular lines, the figure's anatomy is abstracted with a forceful rhythm that recalls the sculptural language of traditional African art.

Though the Smithsonian American Art Museum dates the work to 1935-1938, its use of linoleum rather than wood and its stylistic characteristics suggest it was more likely created during Johnson's tenure at the Harlem Community Art Center (1939–1942), where he began experimenting with linoleum as a printmaking surface.

Nude Recumbent. Ca. 1939-1942. Object Number: WHJ-BP-HCAC-00020. Block print on paperboard. (Linoleum cut) Size: 20 5⁄8 x 27 1⁄2 in. (52.3 x 70.0 cm) irregular. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Smithsonian American Art Museum, 1967.59.976.

Nude Recumbent. Ca. 1939-1942. Object Number: WHJ-BP-HCAC-00021. Hand colored block print on paperboard. (Linoleum cut). Size: 23 7/8 x 29 (60.7 x 73.7) Provenance: Collection of Mr. and Mrs. David Harriton, Minisink Hills, Pennsylvania. Illustrated on page 191 of William H. Johnson, 1901–1970, by Adelyn D. Breeskin and Jan K. Muhlert (Smithsonian Institution Press, 1971)

Nude Recumbent. Ca. 1939-1942. Object Number: WHJ-BP-HCAC-00022. Block print on paperboard. (Linoleum cut) Size: Height 46 cm. Width 61 cm. Provenance: The estate of Holcha Krake; by descent to her grandniece, Johanna Voll. The Wright Foundation for Southern Art. Florence County Museum.

## Lame Man-Full Length, ca. 1939–1942

Six known impressions.

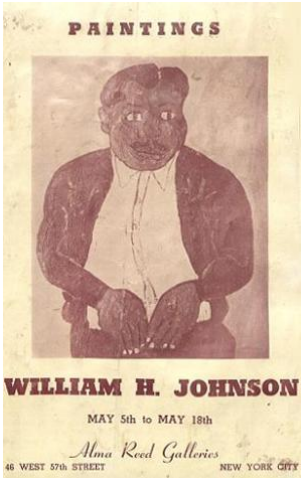
In Lame Man–Full Length, Johnson presents a portrayal of a man with a physical disability. The sitter faces forward in a rigid, upright pose, his broad hands resting heavily on his knees. His gaze appears slightly uncertain, introducing a note of vulnerability and introspection.

The subject was likely an individual Johnson encountered at the Harlem Community Art Center. During his tenure there, he engaged not only with Harlem's artistic community but also with the broader neighborhood, as the Center was committed to serving all residents including semi-skilled laborers, teenage gang members, the elderly, and even patients from New York psychiatric hospitals who benefited from its creative programs.

The theme of disability held personal significance for Johnson. When his stepfather was seriously injured in an accident during Johnson's youth, the family's financial security was abruptly disrupted. As a result, Johnson was forced to leave school at an early age and take on various jobs to help support his mother and four younger siblings. This early confrontation with hardship and responsibility not only shaped his character but also informed his later sensitivity to themes of struggle, resilience, and human dignity in his art.

The print was likely derived from a painting of the same title, Lame Man (ca. 1939–1940). The painting appeared on the cover of the brochure for Johnson's solo exhibition at the Alma Reed Galleries in New York (May 5–18, 1939) and was later reused as the cover image for his exhibition at Kunsthallen in Copenhagen in March 1947.

William H. Johnson, Lame Man, ca. 1939-1940, oil on burlap. Smithsonian American Art Museum, 1967.59.1131




Catalogue cover for Johnson's exhibition at the Alma Reed Galleries, New York, May 5–18, 1939.

Lame Man-Full Length, ca. 1939-1942. Object Number: WHJ-BP-HCAC-00023. Block print on paper (Linocut). Hand-colored with a palette of brown, ochre, dark blue, white, pale blue, and deep green tones. Size: 22 1⁄4 x 17 1⁄8 in. 56.5 x 43.5 cm. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation, Smithsonian American Art Museum, 1967.59.1110R-V.

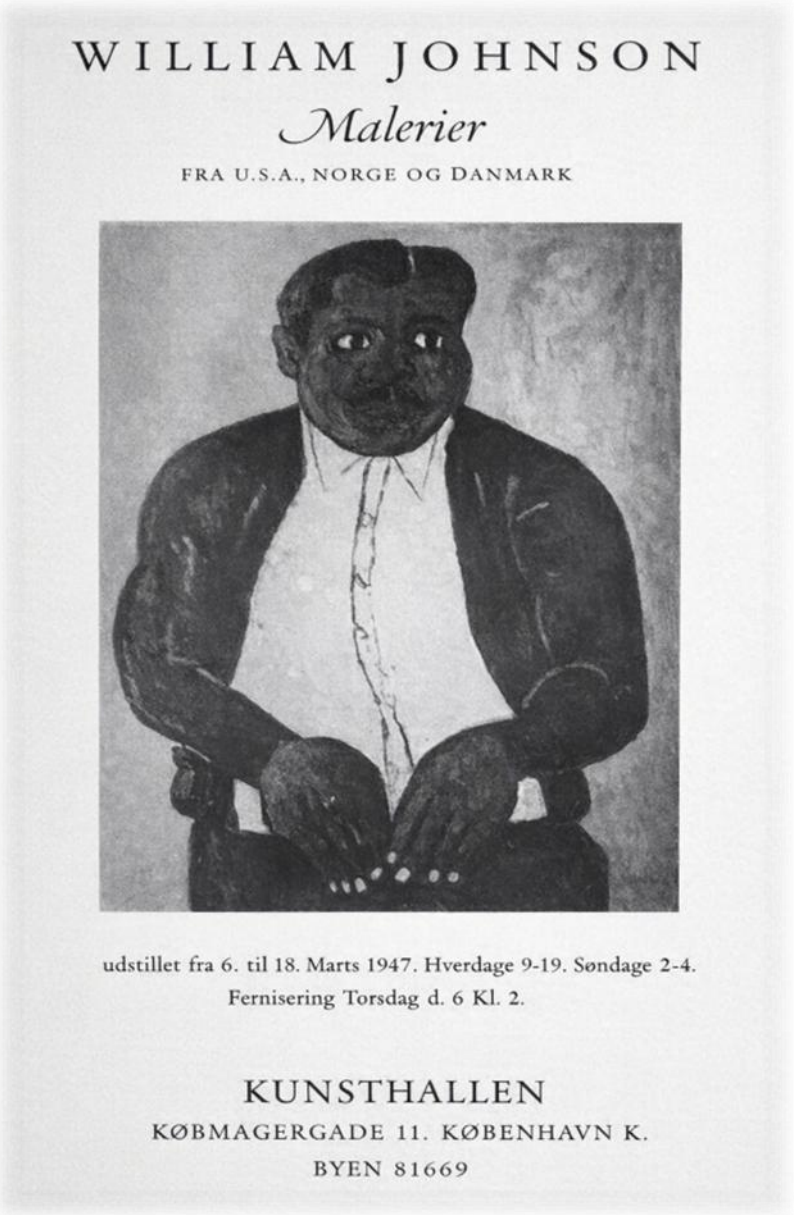
Lame Man-Full Length, ca. 1939-1942. Object Number: WHJ-BP-HCAC-00024.Block print on paper (Linocut). Hand-colored with a palette of red-brown, light blue, white, dark blue, and yellow-green tones. Size: H: 17.5 in. W: 12.5 in. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Courtesy of Oakland Museum of California (OMCA). Object number: A67.62.25

Lame Man-Full Length, ca. 1939-1942. Object Number: WHJ-BP-HCAC-00025.Block print on paper. (Linocut) Size: 19 x 13 ½ inches. Provenance: The estate of Holcha Krake; by descent to her grandniece, Johanna Voll. Illustrated and catalogued as no. 46 in William H. Johnson: Truth Be Told by Steve Turner and Victoria Dailey (1996)

Lame Man-Full Length, ca. 1939-1942. Object Number: WHJ-BP-HCAC-00026.Block print on paper. (Linocut) Size: 10 x 13 ½ inches. Provenance:  Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Collection of Hampton University Museum. Illustrated on page 129 in William H. Johnson: Revisiting an African American Modernist. Kenneth G. Rodger. North Carolina Central University Art Museum in Durham, North Carolina (2006).

Lame Man-Full Length, ca. 1939-1942. Object Number: WHJ-BP-HCAC-00027. Block print on paper (Linocut). Size: H: 29 in W: 22 15/16 in. D: 1 13/16 in. Provenance:  Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Hampton University Museum & Archives. Object ID: 67.44.28

Lame Man-Full Length, ca. 1939-1942. Object Number: WHJ-BP-HCAC-00028. Block print on paper (Linocut). Hand-colored. Size: 25"h x 18⅜"w x 1"d. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Fisk University Galleries. Object ID. #0410


WILLIAM JOHNSON
Malerier
FRA U.S.A., NORGE OG DANMARK
udstillet fra 6. til 18. Marts 1947. Hverdage 9-19. Søndage 2-4.
Fernisering Torsdag d. 6 Kl. 2.
KUNSTHALLEN
KØBMAGERGADE 11. KØBENHAVN K.
BYEN 81669

*Catalogue cover for William H. Johnson's exhibition at Kunsthallen, Copenhagen, 6–18 March 1947. This exhibition marked the final presentation of his work before his institutionalization at Central Islip State Hospital in November 1947. Private photo.*

## Lame Man – Bust, ca. 1939–1942

Six known impressions.

In Lame Man – Bust, Johnson revisits the disabled figure from his full-length composition (WHJ-BP-HCAC-0023-0028), here rendered as a tightly cropped bust portrait. By isolating the upper body, he intensifies the figure's psychological presence, shifting the emphasis from narrative context to individual expression.

The print likely derives from Johnson's tempera painting Portrait of a Man with Mustache (ca. 1939–1940), translated into a more austere and graphic idiom. In this process, Johnson restructures the figure through bold, incised lines. The face is fragmented into rhythmic linear patterns that emphasize structure over likeness, while vertical striations animate the surface, flattening the form and heightening its expressive intensity.

William H. Johnson, Portrait of a Man with Mustache, Ca. 1939-1940. Tempera on paper. Smithsonian American Art Museum, 1967.59.295

Lame Man-Bust, ca. 1939-1942. Object Number: WHJ-BP-HCAC-00032. Block print on paper. (Linocut). Size: 19 ¾ x 15 ¾ inches. Provenance: The estate of Holcha Krake; by descent to her grandniece, Johanna Voll. Illustrated and catalogued as no. 45 in William H. Johnson: Truth Be Told by Steve Turner and Victoria Dailey (1996)

Lame Man-Bust. Ca, 1939-1942. Object Number: WHJ-BP-HCAC-00033. Block print on paper. (Linocut). Size: 16 1/4 x 13 1/2 in. irr. 41.275 x 34.29 cm. Provenance: Gift of the Philadelphia Commercial Museum (also known as the Philadelphia Civic Center Museum), Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Accession number: 2004.13.8

Lame Man-Bust, ca. 1939-1942. Object Number: WHJ-BP-HCAC-00034. Block print on paper. (Linocut). Size: H: 27 in. W: 22 ½ in. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Hampton University Museum & Archives. Object ID: 67.44.37

Lame Man-Bust, ca. 1939-1942. Object Number: WHJ-BP-HCAC-00032. Block print on paper. (Linocut). Size: 19 ¾ x 15 ¾ inches. Provenance: The estate of Holcha Krake; by descent to her grandniece, Johanna Voll. Illustrated and catalogued as no. 45 in William H. Johnson: Truth Be Told by Steve Turner and Victoria Dailey (1996)

Lame Man-Bust. Ca, 1939-1942. Object Number: WHJ-BP-HCAC-00033. Block print on paper. (Linocut). Size: 16 1/4 x 13 1/2 in. irr. 41.275 x 34.29 cm. Provenance: Gift of the Philadelphia Commercial Museum (also known as the Philadelphia Civic Center Museum), Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Accession number: 2004.13.8

Lame Man-Bust, ca. 1939-1942. Object Number: WHJ-BP-HCAC-00034. Block print on paper. (Linocut). Size: H: 27 in. W: 22 ½ in. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Hampton University Museum & Archives. Object ID: 67.44.37

# The Deep South.

Following his return to the United States in 1939, William H. Johnson turned increasingly toward themes of place, personal experience, and cultural identity, developing a series of prints inspired by Florence, South Carolina. Unlike his earlier work, which often responded to immediate surroundings, these later compositions drew upon lived experience and subjective reflection, shaping both their imagery and expressive form. The prints portray family members, local residents, and scenes of everyday life in the rural South, reimagined through a deeply personal and emotionally inflected perspective.

The series began during Johnson's tenure at the Harlem Community Art Center (1939–1942) and was likely expanded during his five-month stay in Florence in 1944 after the sudden death of his wife, Holcha Krake. Returning to his hometown allowed Johnson to reconnect with relatives and the broader social environment of his youth.

Johnsons Deep South series consists of five individual works.

Group with Children, ca. 1939-44.

Evening, ca. 1939-44.

Farm Couple at Well, ca. 1939-44.

Untitled (Little Sis with Doll Carriage), ca. 1939–1944

Porch Talk. ca. 1939-44.

William H. Johnson, Deep South, ca. 1940-1941, screenprint on paper. Smithsonian American Art Museum,1967.59.1016

## Group with Children, ca. 1939-44.

Two known impressions.

In Group with Children, Johnson depicts two adult female figures holding their children within a compact, vertical composition. The forms are carved in bold, simplified lines that emphasize gesture and emotional connection over descriptive detail. Strong contours and flattened shapes give the figures a sculptural presence, while their physical closeness reinforces the theme of protection and maternal care.

Vertical striations in the background suggest wooden walls, fencing, or possibly the interior of a modest home. This compressed spatial setting creates a sense of enclosure that feels both intimate and protective, heightening the emotional resonance of the scene.

Group with Children, ca. 1939-1944. Object Number:  WHJ-BP-TDS-0001. Block print on paper (Woodcut). Signed Wm. H. Johnson lower right. Titled Group with children. Annotated: "NOR-502-13. Size: 11 1⁄8 x 9 in. 28.4 x 22.9 cm. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation, Smithsonian American Art Museum. 1967.59.972.

Group with Children, ca. 1939-1944. Object Number:  WHJ-BP-TDS-0002. Block print and ink wash on paper. (Woodcut). 9.5 × 8 in. (24.13 × 20.32 cm). Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation, Courtesy of the Amistad Research Center, New Orleans, LA. Accession Number: ARCH.HAR.WHJO.1939.21.

## Evening, ca, 1939- 1944.

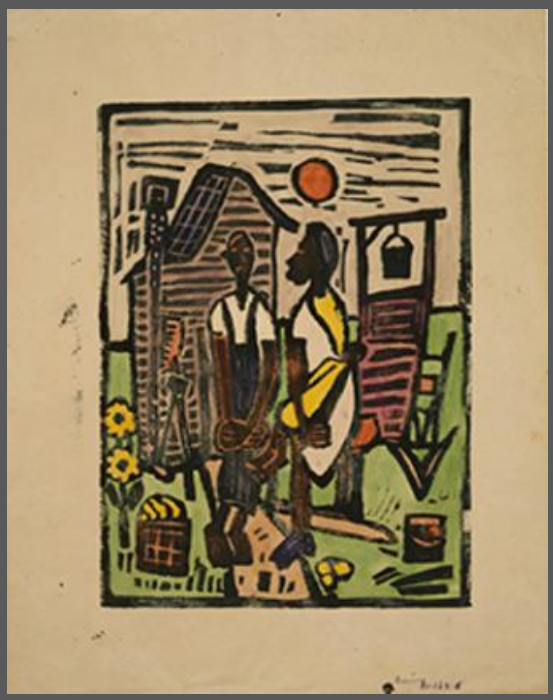
Four known impressions.

In Evening, Johnson presents a domestic scene set in the rural South. The composition features a southern black couple seated outside a modest wooden home, with the woman gently nursing a child. Behind them, the setting sun hangs low in the sky, casting a sense of calm over the scene. The couple sits close together, their relaxed postures and shared gaze suggesting a moment of quiet connection and intimacy at the close of a day's labor.

The same family appears in several of Johnson's other works executed in oil on paperboard, including two variants of Farm Family Nursing Child (ca. 1941–1944), suggesting that the block print was likely derived from these painted compositions.

William H. Johnson, Farm Family Nursing Child, ca. 1942-1944. Oil on paperboard, Smithsonian American Art Museum, 1967.59.614

Evening. Ca. 1939-1944. Object Number: WHJ-BP-TDS-0003. Block print on paper (Woodcut). Hand colored with palette of earthy tones with bright accents of yellow, red, and orange. Size: 13.5 x 10 in. 34.29 x 25.4 cm. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Courtesy of the Amistad Research Center, New Orleans, LA. Accession Number:



Evening. Ca. 1939-1944. Object Number: WHJ-BP-TDS-0004. Block print on paper (Woodcut). Hand colored with palette of earthy greens, muted blues, warm browns, and pops of yellow, red, and orange. Signed W.H Johnson in pencil on verso. Annotated: FO-162-(1). Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Retrieved from the Library of Congress.

Evening. Ca. 1939-1944. Object Number: WHJ-BP-TDS-0005. Block print on paper (Woodcut). Size: 13.25 x 10.25 in. 33.66 x 25.04 cm. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Courtesy of the Amistad Research Center, New Orleans, LA. Accession Number: ARCHAR.WHJO.1939.10.

Evening. Ca. 1939-1944. Object Number: WHJ-BP-TDS-0006. Block print on paper (Woodcut). Size: H: 17 7/8 in. W: 13 7/8 in. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Hampton University Museum & Archives. Object ID: 67.44.29.

William H. Johnson, Farm Family-Nursing Child, ca. 1942-1944. Oil on paperboard, Smithsonian American Art Museum, 1967.59.613

## Farm Couple at Well, ca. 1939–1944

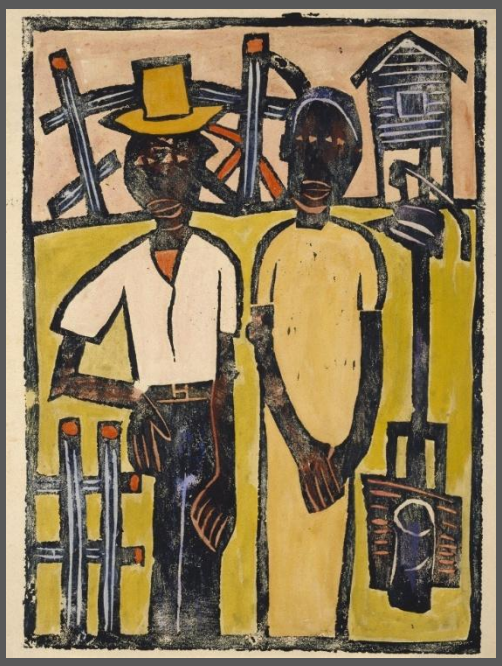
Three known impressions.

In Farm Couple at Well, Johnson employs simplified forms and bold outlines to depict a rural scene centered on two figures. A man and woman stand side by side; the man, wearing a hat and a tucked-in shirt, rests one hand on his hip, while the woman, modestly dressed, clasps her hands in front of her. A nearby well and bucket emphasize their connection to the land and the labor of agrarian life.

The figures are presented alongside the tools and structures of their daily existence, recalling the tradition of secular saints identified by their attributes. Johnson likely based the print on related depictions of the couple executed in tempera on paper and oil on plywood during the same period.

William H. Johnson, Farm Couple at Well. Ca. 1939-1940. Oil on plywood. Smithsonian American Art Museum, 1967.59.671.

William H. Johnson, Folk Couple. Ca. 1941. Tempera on paper. Hampton University Museum & Archives. Object ID: 68.1.9



Farm Couple at Well, ca. 1939–1944. Object Number: WHJ-BP-TDS-0007. Block print on paper (Woodcut). Hand colored with palette of earthy yellows, muted oranges, soft blues, deep browns, and black outlines. Size: 17 7⁄8 x 14 1⁄2 in. 45.4 x 36.9 cm. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation, Smithsonian American Art Museum, 1967.59.1068. Exhibited: New York Public Library, Countee Cullen Branch, December 5, 1956-March 1, 1957.

Farm Couple at Well, ca. 1939–1944. Object Number: WHJ-BP-TDS-0008. Block print on paper (Woodcut). Hand colored with palette of pale greens, soft pinks, deep blues, earthy yellows, and black outlines. Size: H: 13.5 in, W: 10.5 in. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Courtesy of Oakland Museum of California (OMCA). Object number: A67.62.23.

Farm Couple at Well, ca. 1939–1944. Object Number: WHJ-BP-TDS-0009. Block print on paper (Woodcut). Size. 15.5 x 11 in. 39.37 x 27.94 cm. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Courtesy of the Amistad Research Center, New Orleans, LA. Accession Number: ARC.HAR.WHJO.1942.09.

## Untitled (Little Sis with Doll Carriage), ca. 1939–1944

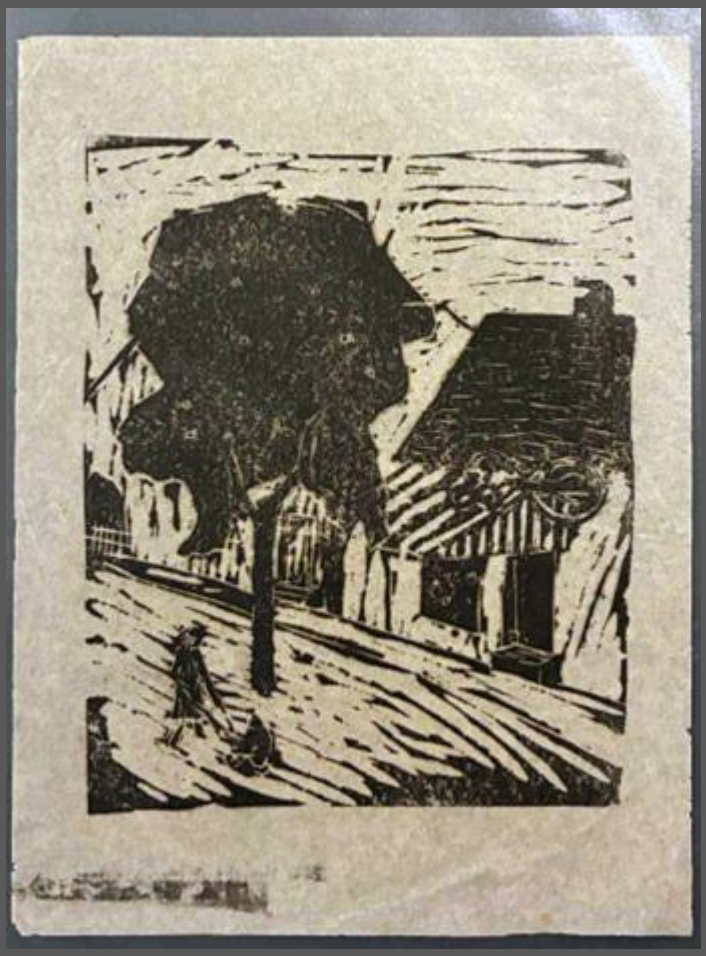
Four known impressions.

In Little Sis with Doll Carriage, Johnson depicts a quiet moment of rural southern life. A young girl possibly depicting his niece, Ernestine Brown pushes a carriage along a sloping sidewalk toward a neighborhood bakery, framed by a large tree and a modest storefront.

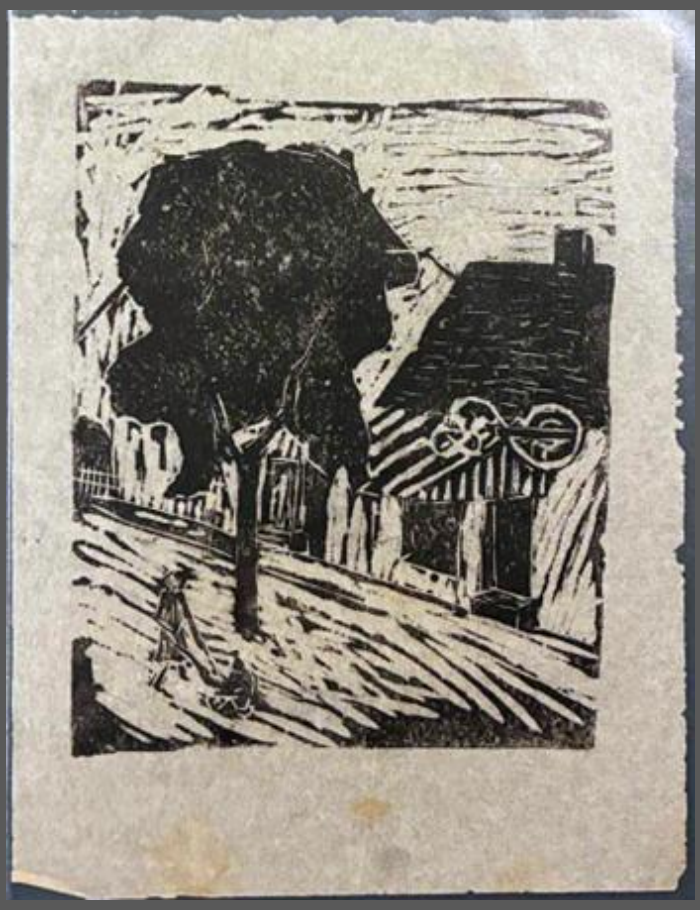
In June 1944, Johnson returned to Florence, South Carolina, for the first time in fourteen years, staying at his mother's home. During this visit, he produced several portraits of family members, including Li'l Sis (1944), a painting depicting his niece, Ernestine Brown.

Li'l Sis was later exhibited at Kunsthallen, Copenhagen, in 1947 under the Danish title Lille Sis med Dukkevogn (Little Sis with Doll Carriage). In this context, the motif was mistakenly interpreted by the Danish exhibition organizers as a child playing with a doll rather than as a depiction of a young girl protectively caring for her baby sister.

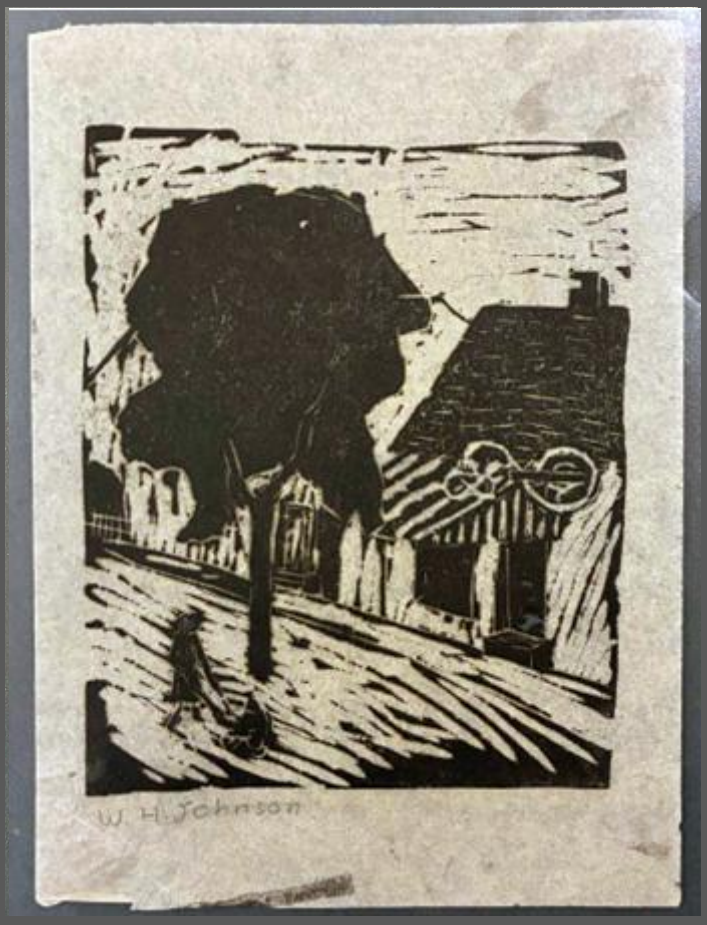
William H. Johnson, Li'l Sis, 1944. Oil on paperboard. The painting portrays Ernestine Brown standing beside a baby carriage, holding a flyswatter as she shields her infant sister from insects. Smithsonian American Art Museum, 1967.59.1023.



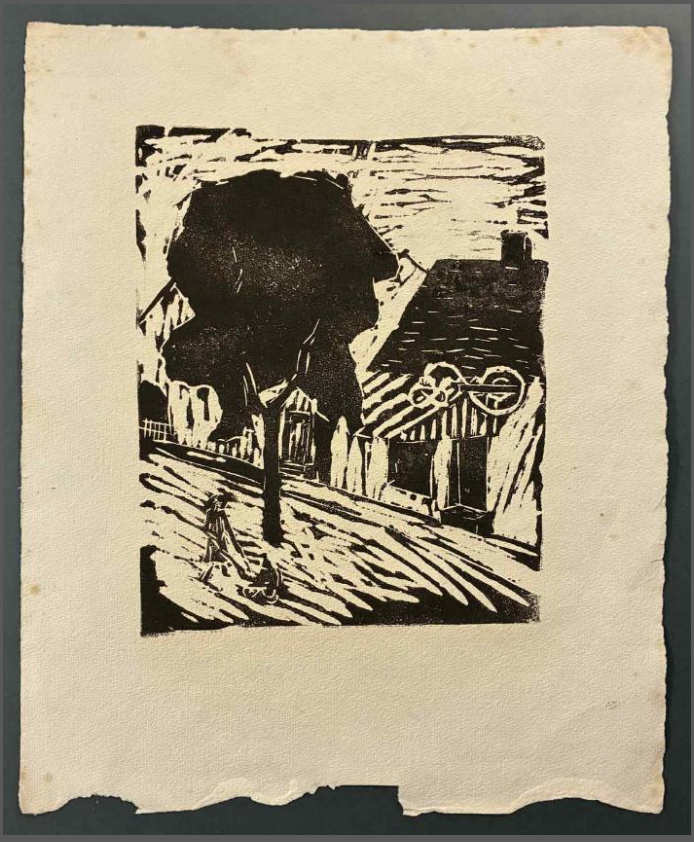
Little Sis with Doll Carriage, ca. 1939–1944. Object Number: WHJ-BP-TDS-00010. Block print (linocut) on vellum paper. Size. 19 x 25 cm. Provenance: The artist to Niels Lindberg, Nr. Broby, Fyn, Denmark; subsequently in a private Danish collection.



Little Sis with Doll Carriage, ca. 1939–1944. Object Number: WHJ-BP-TDS-00011. Block print (linocut) on vellum paper. Size. 19 x 25 cm. Provenance: The artist to Niels Lindberg, Nr. Broby, Fyn, Denmark; subsequently in a private Danish collection.




Little Sis with Doll Carriage, ca. 1939–1944. Object Number: WHJ-BP-TDS-00012. Block print (linocut) on vellum paper. Inscribed W.H. Johnson lower left. Size. 18 ½ x 25 cm. Provenance: The artist to Niels Lindberg, Nr. Broby, Fyn, Denmark; subsequently in a private Danish collection. Collection of the National Gallery of Denmark (SMK), Copenhagen.



Little Sis with Doll Carriage, ca. 1939–1944. Object Number: Object Number: WHJ-BP-TDS-00013. Block print on Wove paper (Linocut). Size. 24 x 29 cm. Provenance: The artist to Niels Lindberg, Nr. Broby, Fyn, Denmark; subsequently in a private Danish collection.

*The painting Li'l Sis on view at the William H. Johnson exhibition at the National Collection of Fine Arts, 1971. From left to right: Johnson's sisters, Lucy McAfee and Lillian Cooper, with his niece Ernestine Brown, the model for Li'l Sis. Image published in The Washington Post (Nov. 5, 1971). Photograph by Ellsworth Davis, courtesy of the Archives of American Art.*

## Porch Talk, ca. 1939-1944.

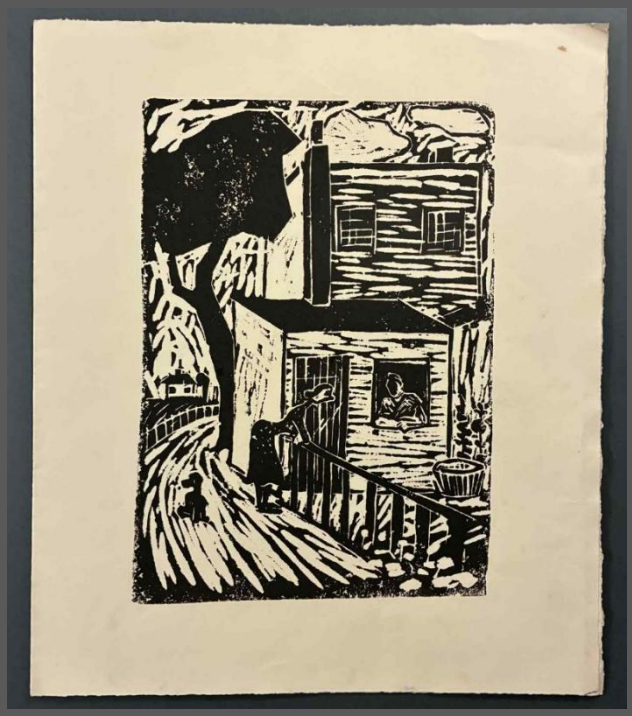
Five known impressions.

In Porch Talk, Johnson depicts the exterior of a rural Southern homestead, composed of a house, a winding road, and a narrow porch set within the surrounding landscape. A female figure with an elongated body leans over the porch railing, engaged in quiet exchange with another figure framed within a nearby window.

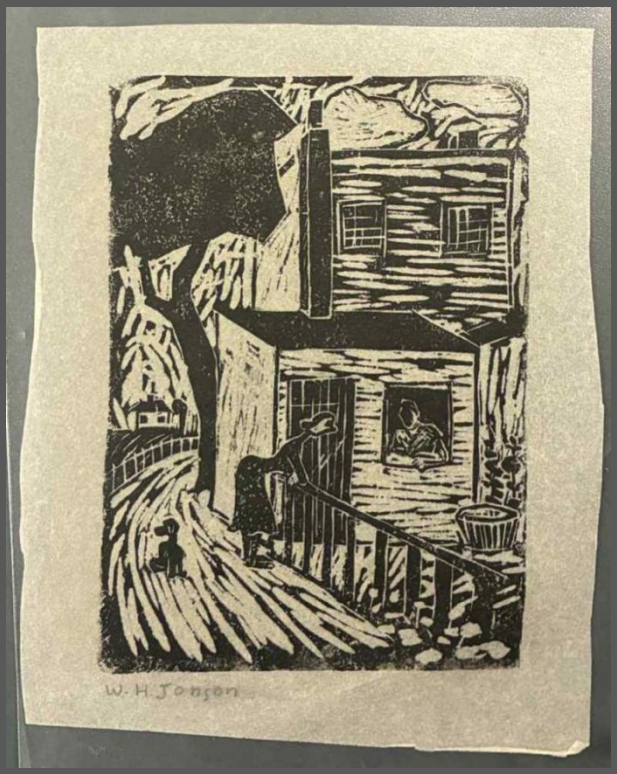
The scene is animated by carefully observed details, a bucket near the steps, flowers beside the house, and a small dog turned away from the figures that anchor the composition. The figures are partially absorbed into the architecture and landscape, emphasizing lived experience and domestic routine rather than individualized portraiture.

Its title, Porch Talk, evokes the relaxed but meaningful conversations linked to front-porch culture, an enduring part of Southern life. In the American South, the porch was an important social space where people gathered to sit, talk, watch others, and share stories.  In several portraits from this period, Johnson uses the porch as both setting and perspective, placing his figures within this familiar domestic threshold.

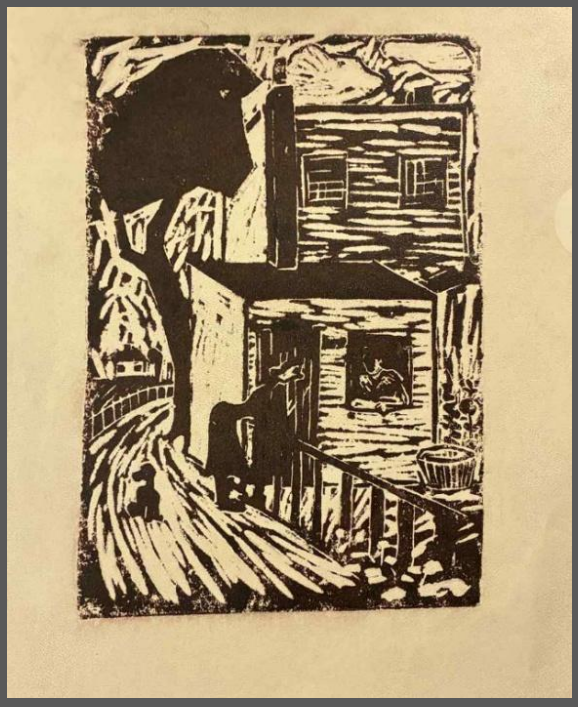
Of the five known impressions of this composition, only one carries the title Porch Talk (WHJ-BP-TDS-0014).



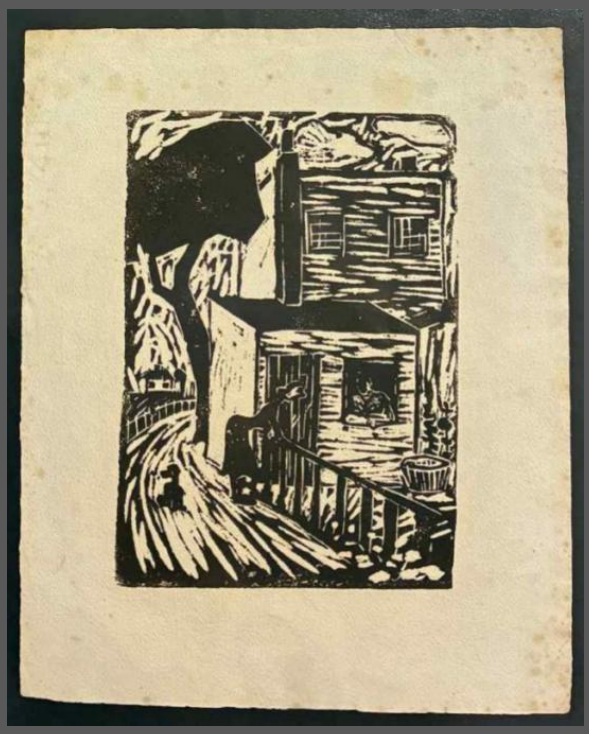
Porch Talk, ca. 1939–1944. Object Number: WHJ-BP-TDS-00014. Block print on wove paper (Linocut). Inscribed W.H. Johnson and titled: Porch Talk on verso. Size. 24 x 28 cm. Provenance: The artist to Niels Lindberg, Nr. Broby, Fyn, Denmark; subsequently in a private Danish collection.



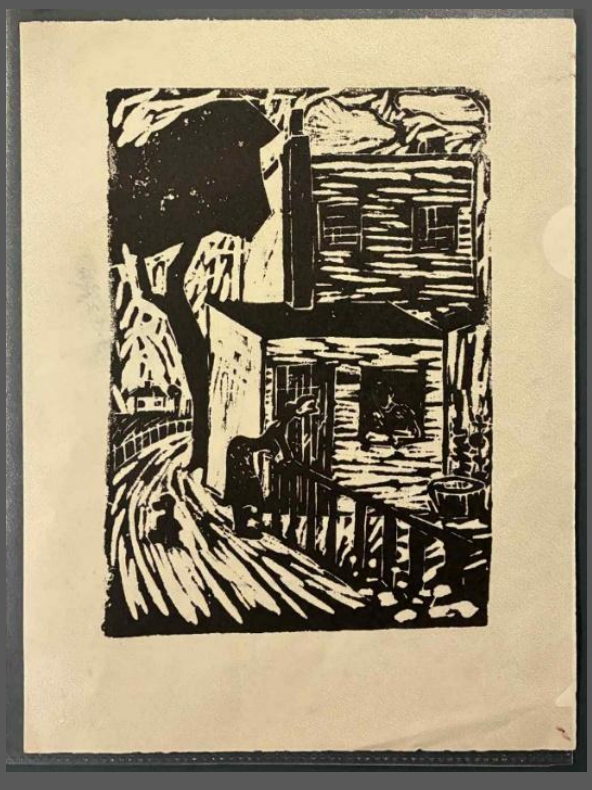

Porch Talk, ca. 1939–1944. Object Number: WHJ-BP-TDS-00015. Block print (linocut) on vellum paper. Inscribed W.H. Johnson lower left. Size. 20 x 25 cm. Provenance: The artist to Niels Lindberg, Nr. Broby, Fyn, Denmark; subsequently in a private Danish collection. Collection of the National Gallery of Denmark (SMK), Copenhagen.



Porch Talk, ca. 1939–1944. Object Number: WHJ-BP-TDS-00016. Block print on wove paper (Linocut). Size. 20 x 25 cm. Provenance: The artist to Niels Lindberg, Nr. Broby, Fyn, Denmark; subsequently in a private Danish collection.



Porch Talk, ca. 1939–1944. Object Number: WHJ-BP-TDS-00017. Block print on wove paper (Linocut). Size. 24 x 29 cm. Provenance: The artist to Niels Lindberg, Nr. Broby, Fyn, Denmark; subsequently in a private Danish collection.



Porch Talk, ca. 1939–1944. Object Number: WHJ-BP-TDS-00018. Block print on wove paper (Linocut). Size. 21 x 28 cm. Provenance: The artist to Niels Lindberg, Nr. Broby, Fyn, Denmark; subsequently in a private Danish collection.

*Man on Porch with Young Girl in Yard. South Carolina, 1937. Photo by Frances Benjamin Johnston. Image credit: Glasshouse Images*.

# 9. Religious Themes & Spiritual Visions

Among the various phases of his career, William H. Johnson's engagement with religious subject matter stands out as particularly intimate and spiritually expressive. Although he had explored biblical themes earlier in works such as Jesus and the Three Marys (ca. 1939) and I Baptize Thee (ca. 1940), it was only after the death of his wife, the Danish artist Holcha Krake, in 1944 that such imagery assumed a central role. In the wake of this loss, Johnson turned increasingly to sacred subjects as a means of processing grief, seeking solace, and reconnecting with his spiritual and cultural roots.

Johnson's religious print series consists of five individual works.

Head of a Saint. Ca. 1939 – 1944.

Mor og Barn (Mother and Child) Ca. 1939 – 1944.

Den Hellige Familie (The Holy Family) Ca. 1939 – 1944.

Nedtagelsen af korset (Descent from the Cross) Ca. 1939 – 1944.

Untitled (Kiss of the Saints), ca. 1939–1944

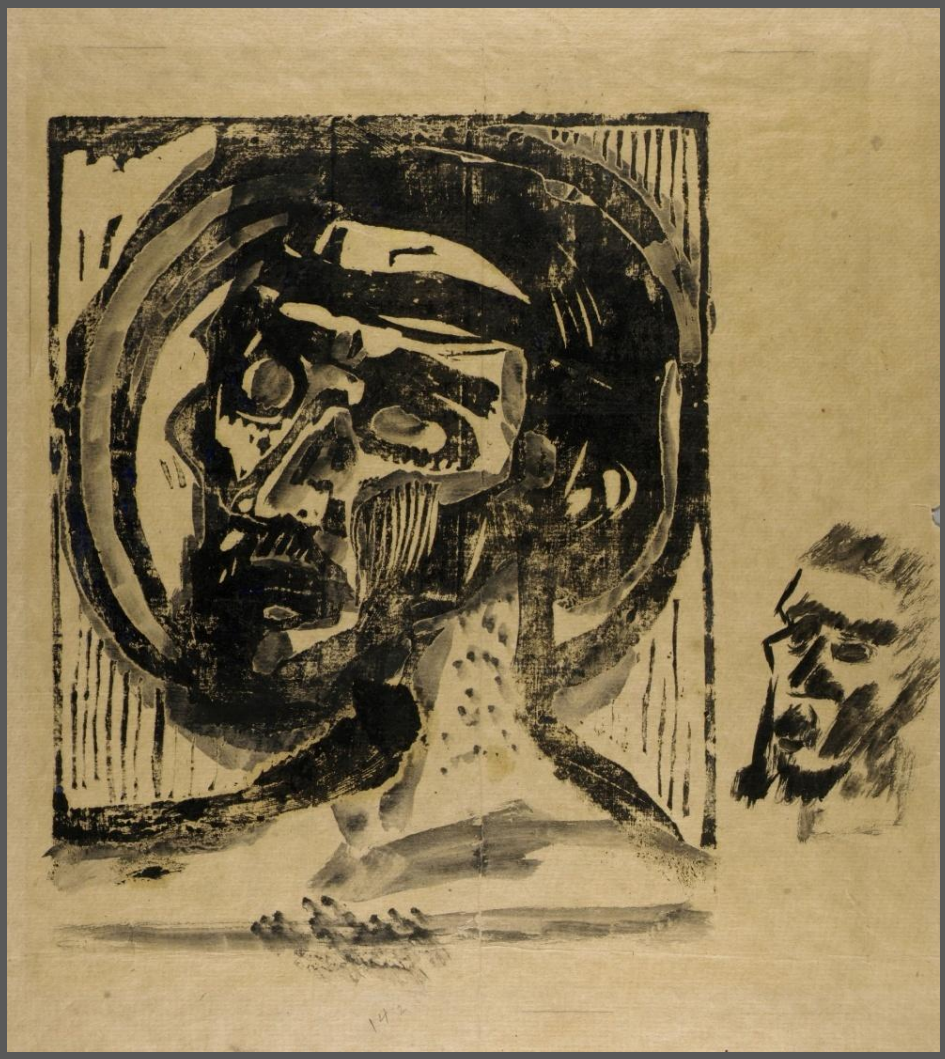
*William H. Johnson, Religious sketch scenes ca. 1944.* Detail. *Smithsonian American Art Museum, 1967.59.365*

## Head of a Saint. Ca. 1939 – 1944.

One known impression.

In Head of a Saint, Johnson presents two expressive images: a large, roughly carved face on the left, and a smaller, sketch-like portrait on the right. The central head is enclosed in a circular halo, and a dark horizontal band across the forehead. To the right, a smaller, more loosely drawn portrait appears, perhaps a study of the same figure or an observer in mourning. Together, the two images suggest a meditation on holiness, sacrifice, and human pain, conveyed through Johnson's characteristically expressionistic style.

The Smithsonian American Art Museum dates the print to c. 1930–1938; however, the religious subject matter suggests a later date. Johnson’s earliest known explorations of such themes appear around 1939, and they became increasingly central to his work following Holcha Krake’s death in 1944. The print was therefore most likely produced between c. 1939 and 1944.



Head of a Saint. Ca. 1939-1944. Object Number: WHJ-BP-REL-0001. Block print and ink wash on paper. (Woodcut). Size: 17 3⁄4 x 16 in. 45.0 x 40.5 cm. Provenance: Gift of the Harmon Foundation. Smithsonian American Art Museum, 1967.59.84.

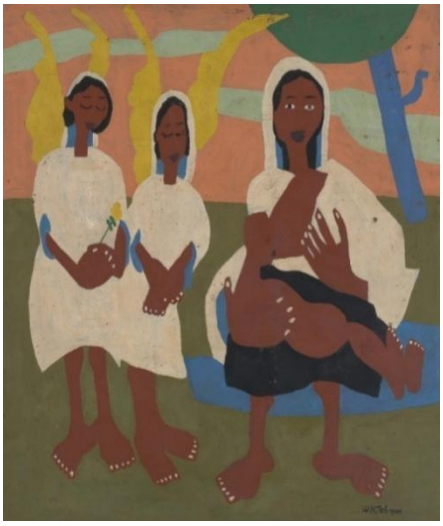
## Mor Og Barn (Mother and Child) Ca. 1939-1944

Two known impressions.

In Mor Og Barn (Mother and Child), Johnson depicts an intimate scene of maternal care and protection. A monumental nude woman cradles an infant within her arms, her bowed head and enveloping body conveying tenderness, vulnerability, and quiet devotion. The composition is rendered through rough carving, fractured contours, and expressive distortions that privilege emotional intensity over naturalistic detail. Faint, ghostlike faces emerging in the background introduce a subtle spiritual dimension, as though silently witnessing the sacred bond between mother and child.

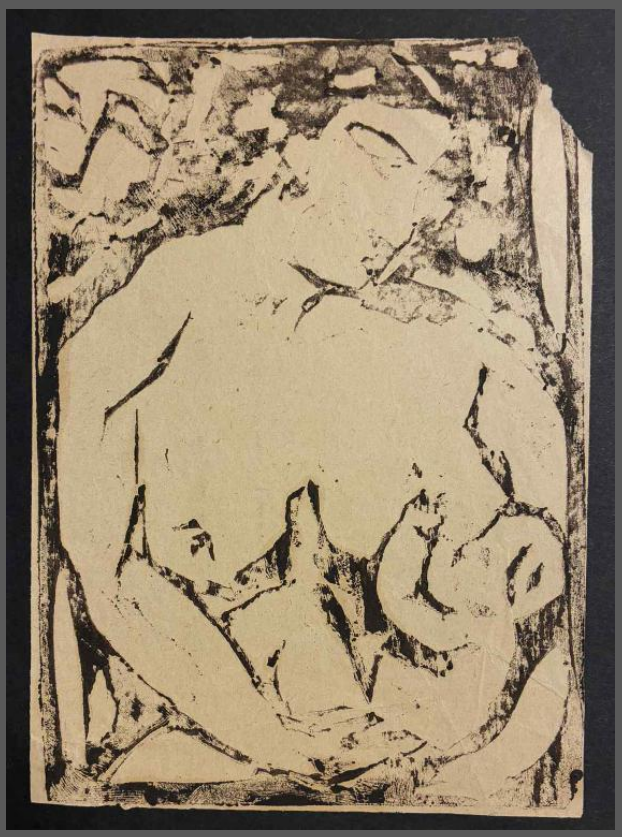
Johnson explored the theme of motherhood throughout his career, often blending the personal with the spiritual. In New Born Babe (c. 1944–1945), he evokes the Virgin Mary, presenting motherhood as both universal and sacred.

It is uncertain whether the print's Danish title, Mor og Barn, was assigned by Johnson himself or added during early cataloguing; however, contemporary journalists in the 1930s noted his strong command of Danish.



William H. Johnson. New Born Babe, ca. 1944-1945. Oil on paperboard. Smithsonian American Art Museum, 1967.59.599

A page from William H. Johnson's scrapbook (c. 1930–1947) includes a reproduction of Leonardo da Vinci's Virgin and Child (1499–1500), suggesting it may have served as a source of visual inspiration for his work. Image courtesy of Florence County Museum.



Mor Og Barn (Mother and Child) Ca. 1939-1944. Object Number: WHJ-BP-REL-0002. Block print on Vellum paper (Woodcut). 12 ½ x 17 cm. Provenance: The artist to Niels Lindberg, Nr. Broby, Fyn, Denmark; subsequently in a private Danish collection. The work is catalogued as Mor Og Barn and listed as No. 3 in Niels Lindberg's inventory.

Mor Og Barn (Mother and Child) Ca. 1939-1944. Object Number: WHJ-BP-REL-0003. Block print on paper (Woodcut). 12 ½ x 17 cm. Inscribed in Danish: Eget tryk I/ artist's proof I . Provenance: The artist to Niels Lindberg, Nr. Broby, Fyn, Denmark; subsequently in a private Danish collection. The work is catalogued as Mor Og Barn and listed as No. 3 in Niels Lindberg's inventory.

## Den Hellige Familie (The Holy Family) Ca. 1939-1944

One known impression.

In Den Hellige Familie (The Holy Family), Johnson presents a devotional scene in which visitors bring offerings to the Christ child. Using a carving technique reminiscent of his 1933 self-portrait, he constructs the composition through sharply incised, rhythmic lines that define form through contrast rather than tonal modeling. The figures are elongated and angular, their bodies shaped by dense networks of carved marks that create a heightened sense of movement and spiritual intensity.

It remains uncertain whether the Danish title Den Hellige Familie was assigned by Johnson himself or added during early cataloguing; however, contemporary accounts note his strong command of the language.

Den Hellige Familie (The Holy Family) Ca. 1939-1944. Object Number: WHJ-BP-REL-0004. Block print on Vellum paper (Linocut). Signed W.H. Johnson. Size 18 x 19 cm. Collection stamp: Tilhorer Niels Lindberg. Nr. Broby. Fyn. Provenance: The artist to Niels Lindberg, Nr. Broby, Fyn, Denmark; subsequently in a private Danish collection. The work is listed as Den Hellige Familie and numbered 3 in Niels Lindbergs inventory list.

## Nedtagelsen Af Korset (Descent from the Cross) Ca. 1939-1944

One known impression.

In Nedtagelsen Af Korset (Descent from the Cross), Johnson presents the solemn removal of Christ from the cross in a stark and emotionally charged composition. A male figure, likely Joseph of Arimathea or another mourner, lowers Christ's elongated body, identified by the radiant halo, which hangs limply and conveys a profound sense of weight and vulnerability.

Executed in bold black-and-white contrasts, the print is defined by rough gouge marks, angular anatomy, and simplified forms characteristic of early 20th-century Expressionist woodcut traditions, interpreted through Johnson's distinctive visual language. Rather than emphasizing naturalistic detail, Johnson approaches the biblical scene through an intensely expressive style that heightens the emotional force and spiritual gravity of the moment.

Art historian Richard J. Powell argues that Johnson reimagines the suffering of Christ through the Black American Southern experience, frequently drawing parallels between racial violence such as lynching and Christ's Passion (Powell, "In My Family of Primitiveness and Tradition," 1991).

It is uncertain whether the print's Danish title, Nedtagelsen Af Korset, was assigned by Johnson himself or added during early cataloguing; however, contemporary journalists in the 1930s noted his strong command of Danish.

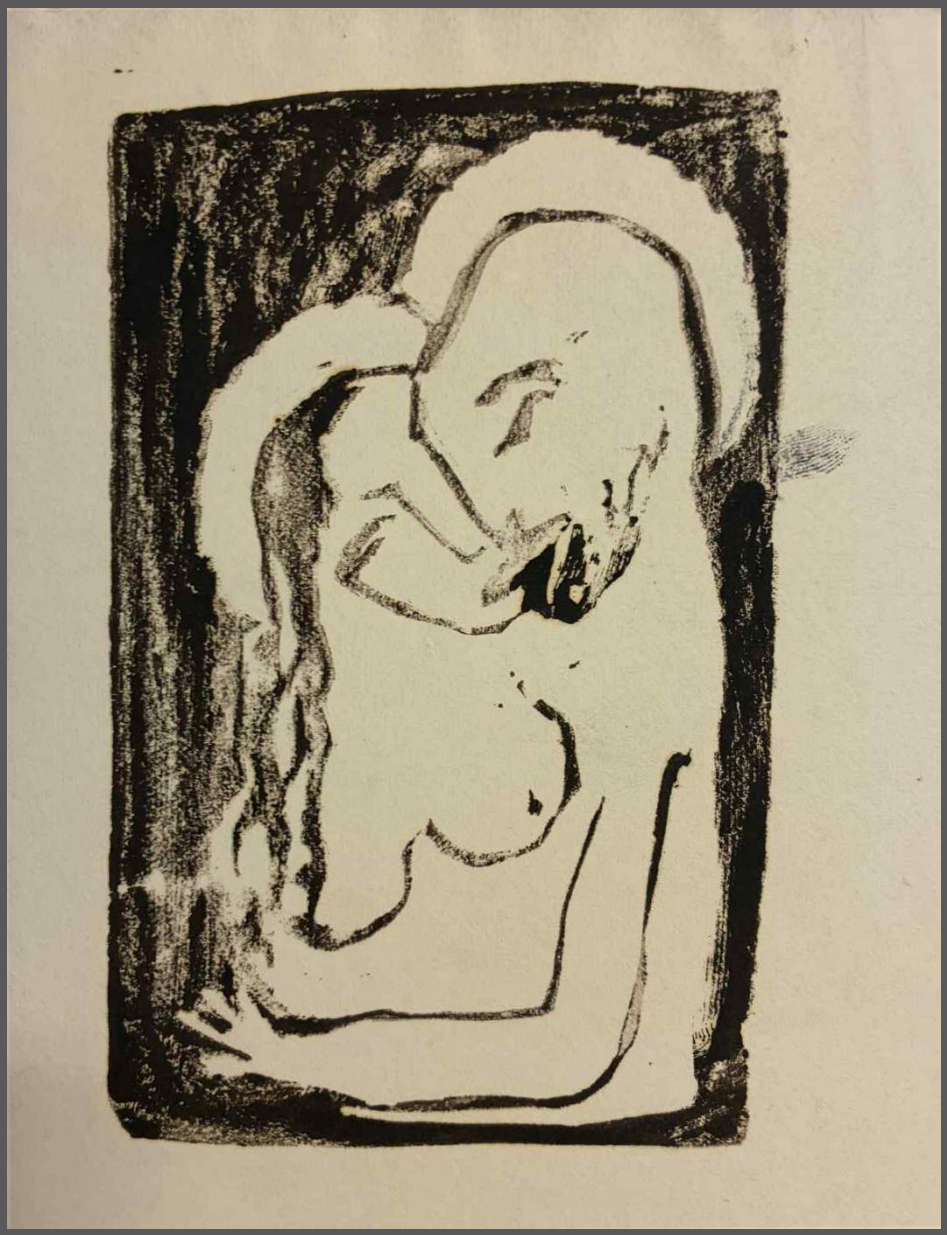
Nedtagelsen af korset (Descent from the Cross) Ca. 1939-1944. Object Number:  WHJ-BP-REL-0005. Block print on Vellum paper (Linocut). Signed W.H. Johnson. Size 15 x 20 cm. Collection stamp: Tilhorer Niels Lindberg. Nr. Broby. Fyn. Provenance: The artist to Niels Lindberg, Nr. Broby, Fyn, Denmark; subsequently in a private Danish collection. The work is listed as Nedtagelsen af korset and numbered no 4 in Niels Lindbergs inventory list.

## Untitled (Kiss of the Saints), Ca. 1939-1944.

One known Impression.

In Kiss of the Saints, Johnson portrays a male and female figure locked in a tender embrace, their bodies merging into a near-continuous form. Halo-like rings encircle their heads, infusing the image with spiritual resonance and suggesting the sanctity of their union. Through sparse, deliberate lines and expressive reduction, Johnson foregrounds emotional intimacy and vulnerability, blending biblical symbolism with the raw immediacy of European Expressionism.

By fusing the sacred with the sensual, he proposes an alternative iconography rooted not in hierarchy but in intimacy. The haloed kiss challenges orthodox Christian depictions of sanctity, instead offering a vision of spiritual union grounded in human tenderness and primal expression.



Untitled (The Kiss), Ca. 1939-1944. Object Number: WHJ-BP-REL-0006. Block print (woodcut) on paper. Size 13 x 17 cm. Provenance: The artist to Niels Lindberg, Nr. Broby, Fyn, Denmark; subsequently in a private Danish collection.

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**Documentary.**

Mossin, Per. Manden der troede Jesus var sort. Danmarks Radio,1983.

# Acknowledgments

This project has been made possible through the generosity, collaboration, and shared commitment of numerous institutions, collectors, scholars, and individuals who have contributed materials, knowledge, and expertise. Their support has been invaluable in assembling what is, to date, the most comprehensive record of William H. Johnson's block prints.

## Public collections

Smithsonian American Art Museum; The Metropolitan Museum of Art; Library of Congress; New York Public Library; Amistad Research Center, New Orleans; Florence County Museum; Hampton University Museum; Howard University Museum; Philadelphia Museum of Art; Greenville County Museum of Art; Oakland Museum of California; Spencer Museum of Art; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; National Gallery of Denmark, Copenhagen; David C. Driskell Center; Trondheim Art Museum; Johannes Larsen Museum; Morgan State University; and Fisk University Galleries.

## Private collections

The Estate of Holcha Krake; Christoph Voll Estate; Mr. and Mrs. David Harriton, Minisink Hills, Pennsylvania; Mr. and Mrs. Douglas Younger, New York (Assistant Director, Harmon Foundation); Professor David C. Driskell, Washington, D.C.; Niels Lindberg, Nr. Broby, Funen, Denmark; Frank and Anni Fahrenholtz, Kerteminde, Denmark; Sverre and Gunvor Forberg, Norway; Aslaug Forberg, Norway; Daniel Ludvigson Klakegg, Norway; Lars and Kjellaug Tjensvoll, Norway; Ingrid Marie Nielsen, Esbjerg, Denmark; Steve Turner Gallery, Los Angeles; Campbell Fine Art; and Thom Pegg, Black Art Auction.

# About the Author

Josephine Rydeng is an independent researcher and curator based in Copenhagen, Denmark. A fourth-generation art dealer, she works at Øbro Kunsthandel, a family-run art dealership established in 1905, where she contributes to research, cataloguing, and the dissemination of artworks.

Her scholarly interests include lesser-known Danish modernist painters as well as international artists who lived and worked in Denmark. Within this field, she has developed specialized focus on African American artists in Scandinavia, particularly William H. Johnson.

She is the author of Holcha Krake: An Essay on the Danish Artist Who Shaped William H. Johnson's World (2025) and Willie and Holcha in Africa (2023).